

OFF-SEASON TRAINING
HOW TO TRAIN CHRISTIAN SPORTS FIGURES TO SPEAK AS GUEST SPEAKERS

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

CHAPTER 1	INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2	THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK	9
CHAPTER 3	LITERATURE REVIEW	45
CHAPTER 4	PROJECT DESIGN	74
CHAPTER 5	OUTCOMES	97
APPENDIX 1	THE LORD’S PRAYER EXAMPLE MATTHEW 6:9-13	104
APPENDIX 2	PRE-TRAINING ASSESSMENT	106
APPENDIX 3	GOSPEL ILLUSTRATION	109
APPENDIX 4	POST-TRAINING ASSESSMENT	110
BIBLIOGRAPHY		113
VITA		116

ABSTRACT

This thesis project is an effort to create a one day five-hour seminar to train Christian sports figures (current or former coaches or athletes) to speak as guest speakers who are consistent with biblical expectations. Thorough statistical, biblical, and literary evidence it demonstrates the need for training Christian sports figures to be Christian speakers. The four topics of training are: communicating the cross of Christ, living out Christian character, capability of studying the Bible, and creating clear biblical messages. Assessments were conducted before and after training to highlight training effectiveness. The training has been further requested for additional seminars.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

The Problem Illustrated

The following scenario illustrates the problem this thesis project will address.

Imagine you are on your way to hear a world famous (or perhaps just locally known) sports figure talk about his or her faith. You are ready for autographs, memorabilia, “selfies”, and your moment of “life-altering” delight to have met, seen, or shaken hands with (insert favorite Christian sports celebrity here). The moment you realize how out of control or worshipful you are emotionally, you also contemplate bringing along a son or daughter to justify your fandom craze.

You arrive early enough to see the athlete taking the stage. As the athlete is introduced, you take out your phone to take pictures and to try to establish the correct angle for a social media “post-worthy selfie.” Just as the athlete begins to share their story, testimony, or message, you wonder how long the event will go. What will he say and how will he say it? Will this athlete be actually worth listening to? Will you have to add words and clarity to the message as you share what you heard with your friends? Will you have to rearrange what he says to complete what you thought he was trying to say to give the message true Christian meaning or to get some worthwhile substance from the speaker’s musings? You question whether your attendance is even worth the time or money spent, or will it be just another fanfare event to receive generally reckless inspiration coupled with an ill-placed bible verse and autograph signings?

The problem this thesis-project addresses is that often sports figures are not trained as speakers, preachers, or teachers, but they are regularly asked to speak to Christian or would-be Christian audiences. As guest communicators, sports figures often do not understand the importance of having Christ-centered character and a clear Christ-centered message. They too-often do not understand the pronounced responsibility that comes with accepting an invitation and opportunity to preach the Gospel.¹

This thesis project is designed to address the question of how to prepare sports figures to present a clear message that is biblically based and is supported by their own life as godly characters. How will they learn unless someone teaches them? Who will help them if there is no resource available to train them?

The Demand in the Real World

There is a generally accepted premise that Christian sports figures are expected to be speakers who use their influence to inspire and invite others to accept the Bible's message about God's love. A December 2013 Barna Group survey examined public awareness of the faith influence of top athletes, looking at the seven people Americans trust more than their pastor. The Barna Group reported that Americans believe professional athletes influence society more than pastors, "by more than a three-to-one margin." Released just before the Super Bowl, Barna's survey suggests that 64% of Americans think pro athletes have more influence in society than professional faith leaders, but only 19% think faith leaders have more influence. Barna also found that

¹ James 3:1. (ESV)

61% of Americans support athletes' public profession of faith, including 88% of evangelicals. The most frequently cited reason given was that they believe athletes have freedom of speech. Perhaps most interesting, only 32% of American think athletes' professions of faith make people more spiritually minded."²

The Undeniable Influence of Sports on U.S. Culture

When an influential athlete becomes a Christian or becomes more vocal about their faith, people want to hear about it because those involved in athletics are so often looked upon with such awe.

Ron Sellers, president of Grey Matter Research, found it noteworthy that so many people outside the realm of religion and sports are aware of Tim Tebow, a former professional football player. Sellers reports that:

To understand this player's crossover awareness (from sports into mainstream culture), we have to look at the fact that almost a third of Americans who pay no attention at all to sports think of Tebow first when asked to name an athlete who is particularly involved in his or her religious faith, He's equally top-of-mind among people who don't go to church, don't read the Bible, and don't identify as evangelicals as he is among those who are religious."³

U.S. culture is heavily invested in the athletic realm, and in turn, the culture is highly influenced by those who succeed as athletes. Striking statistics highlight the culture's involvement in many different levels of athletics. In high school alone, over 7

² Jeremy Weber, "Pro Athletes Influence Society More Than Pastors, Say Two-Thirds of Americans," February 1, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2013/february/pro-athletes-influence-society-more-than-pastors-say-two.html> (accessed February 13, 2018).

³ Sellers, Ron. Grey Matters Research, March 13, 2012, http://www.greymatterresearch.com/index_files/Athletes.htm (accessed March 27, 2018).

million students compete in school sports.⁴ That equals around 54% of enrolled students. In addition, over 44 million youth, ages 18 and under, participate in youth sports.⁵ Of those 44 million, 66% are boys and 34% are girls. That represents 60% of the U.S. youth population.

While these numbers specifically refer to youth in sports, they do not refer to the coaches who are also prominent sports figures. A coach is in the position to influence thousands of lives over the course of a career. Nationally, 2.4 million coaches impact youth in sports, and almost 5 million more adults participate in youth sports in a variety of ways.⁶

Christian sports figures have a tremendous impact on the American Society. When Tim Tebow, a former professional American football player, wore the Bible verse John 3:16 on his face during a football game a reported 94 million people googled that Bible verse as a result.⁷ At one time Tim Tebow had more than 2.8 million followers on twitter, and an estimated 12,000 people attended an Easter service event (approximately 9,000 more than normal for that event), and an estimated 26,000

⁴ High School Athletics Participation: 2016-2017 Report (Indiana: The National Federation of State High School Associations, 2018), 55, <http://www.nfhs.org/media/1018857/2016-17-annual-report.pdf> (accessed March 27, 2018).

⁵ Trends and Participation in Organized Youth Sports: 2008 Report (Florida: National Council of Youth Sports, 2008), 7, <http://www.ncys.org/pdfs/2008/2008-ncys-market-research-report.pdf> (accessed March 27, 2018).

⁶ Trends and Participation in Organized Youth Sports: 2008 Report (Florida: National Council of Youth Sports, 2008), 13, <http://www.ncys.org/pdfs/2008/2008-ncys-market-research-report.pdf> (accessed March 27, 2018).

⁷ Staci Lawrence, Tebow-mania shows God is Great, The Tribune: February 18, 2012, <https://www.greeleytribune.com/news/tebow-mania-shows-god-is-great/> (accessed March 27, 2018).

gathered to hear Tim Tebow speak about Christ for Father's Day.⁸ There is a platform afforded through the world of sports that is immeasurable when one considers the number of potential Christian sports figures not only in the United States but throughout the world. Christian sports figures have a marvelous opportunity to proclaim God's truth to a listening audience. Christian leaders have a responsibility to train these athletes to steward their influence well.

The Need for a Solution

Sports figures can grow in their understanding of the significance of presenting biblical truth accurately and clearly and of developing a strong, Christ-centered character before they accept a Christian speaking engagement.

What if these Christian athletes and coaches were actually equipped for the responsible task of speaking a word for Christ that is so frequently offered to them? They would be able to do immeasurably more than fill seats in an arena. They are trained at the highest level to perform in their sport, but they also need to be trained to introduce people to the God of the Bible whom they are asked to proclaim. Imagine what would happen if they were skilled enough to use their celebrity to draw the crowd, and then to humbly present God's truth to people who desperately need to hear from God and be overwhelmed by His power and grace.

⁸ Mike Florio, Half the Expected Crowd Shows up for Tebow, Pro Football Talk NBC Sports, April 8, 2012, <http://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2012/04/08/half-the-expected-crowd-shows-up-for-tebow> (accessed March 27, 2018).

Organizations invite sports figures, former and current, to speak at banquets and school events. Often, they give moral appeals to sports teams, camps, golf outings, youth groups, men's breakfasts, and of course the cliché "Super Bowl Sunday" half-time message. These opportunities would undoubtedly be more fruitful if someone provided a way to equip these sports celebrities to accurately and effectively communicate God's word.

A Solution to the Problem

This thesis project is a training guide for future ministry leaders to follow in the context of teaching a one-day mini-camp designed to equip sports figures to communicate the Gospel message; begin to grow in Christian character; and learn to study the Bible so they can offer a clear biblical message.

The training guide will be a tool to equip pastors, chaplains, and qualified spiritual leaders to train sports figures at all levels to preach God's truth. The one-day mini-camp will provide the inspiration, information, and skills that help train them to present a simple Gospel message to their audience.

The content of the training will follow a simple, concise, substantive process in each of the four sessions. A specific method of explaining and sharing the Gospel will be included, with a take-home resource for further training. It will include a vivid focus on what Christian character is, some instruction in how to attain it. It will include Bible study tools to help develop a more accurate understanding of a Bible passage. Finally, participants will receive some instruction in how to prepare a clear message.

The expectation is that Christian sports figures who are trained to speak will become more effective, more trusted, and humbly confident as they focus on honoring the Lord with their speaking opportunities.

Thesis Outline

Chapter 2 of the thesis will examine four key Bible passages that focus on the importance of properly understanding God's message, the essential role of the speaker's character, the speaker's ability to handle the bible, and also speak clear biblical messages.

Chapter 3 addresses how extra-biblical literature speaks to four topics that are important to this thesis's purpose. First, it will address the significance of Christ-centered message; second, the role of the speaker's character; third, competency in studying the Scriptures and fourth, the clear delivery of a message. Some of the research draws from information available through the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Athletes in Action.

Chapter 4 is a presentation of the project's curriculum used in the one-day mini-camp and the training guide. The one-day mini-camp will take place over the course of five hours. Following a pre-training assessment, the first hour session incorporates teaching and training on Christ-centered clarity. The second hour includes a review of the pre-training assessment, with an emphasis on Christian character. Additional time in the second hour is devoted to teaching and discipleship in how to grow in Christian maturity. The third hour focuses on helping participants become competent to study Scripture with simple practical steps. The fourth hour concludes the training with hands-

on practice in clear biblical speaking, with the implementation of some delivery concepts. Each session includes monologue, dialogue, practical application and assessments. There is also time for breaks and feedback.

Chapter 5 presents the post-training assessment used to evaluate the mini-camp experience. The feedback from students and instructors will be used to further refine and improve the min-camp's effectiveness.

CHAPTER 2 THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Christian sports figures (coaches and athletes, both former and current) are routinely recruited to speak about their faith in Christ at events with hopes that they will draw crowds. The late Reggie White (NFL Hall of Famer) graphically describes the demands of his namesake as a speaker, “Really, in many respects I’ve been prostituted.”¹ Instead of being invited to speak for the content of his messages, White emphatically states that he felt used or “prostituted” for his fame as a Christian speaker. He was not trained how to speak about the gospel. He was not tutored in what God expects of a messenger’s character. There was no mentoring in how to understand the bible. No one equipped White with how to deliver a biblical message. White, by his mere presence as a keynote speaker, was recruited merely to raise money, attract crowds, and entertain the audience.

God-fearing sports stars speak in venues that range from graduation ceremonies, sports awards banquets, church outreach events, and Super Bowl Sunday events, to youth sports teams, church services, fundraisers, and youth events. Easily inspired individuals who are longing to gain some sense of connection to, and direction from, their favorite Jesus-loving performer pile into the venue to listen.

These speakers of Christian truth with aspirations to motivate must do more than only move their listeners emotionally when they teach the truths of God.

¹ David Waters, “Religion,” *Reading Eagle Newspaper*, February 5, 2005.

Otherwise, this is a form of star-validated Christian speaking that, according to Reggie White, is more entertainment than ministry: “I was an entertainer. People seemed to want to be entertained rather than taught.”² Instead, those who accept the opportunity to teach others in matters of Christian living are accountable to the God-given standards of biblical teachers, as opposed to settling for being mere performers.

The Apostle Paul asserts that teaching comes from the word of God, inclusive of the gospel of God in Christ as the great standard.³ James, who is widely held as the brother of Jesus,⁴ explains that those who teach will be held to “stricter judgment.”⁵ Bible commentary author Donald Burdick writes, “James simply says that the judgment of teachers will be especially strict because greater responsibility rests on teachers. The reason for this is that the teacher’s essential instrument—the tongue which is so easily misused, has great influence.”⁶ James believes that there is great risk in teaching because everyone stumbles, or more specifically, “sins” in many ways through the words that come from their mouths.⁷ Rather, teaching must be done only by those who have a demonstrated competence and maturity.⁸

When sports figures speak as teachers of Christian truth, they have the same responsibility as anyone who would take on such a gospel opportunity. Teachers of

² Tom Krattenmaker, *Onward Christian Athletes: Turning Ballparks into Pulpits and Players into Preachers* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 190.

³ Colossians 1:5.

⁴ Donald W. Burdick, “James.” In *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 12:161.

⁵ James 3:1.

⁶ Burdick, “James,” 186.

⁷ Robert James Utley, *Jesus’ Half-Brothers Speak: James and Jude* (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2000), 43.

⁸ Utley, *Jesus’ Half-Brothers Speak*, 44.

truth, even those with a sports platform, are held to the high biblical standards as the Apostle Paul specifies for preaching the gospel of Christ (the cross) in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, living above reproach in their personal lives (Christian character) in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, being approved handlers of Scripture (capable students) from 2 Timothy 2:14-19, and constructing messages (clear biblical messages) driven by God's word in 2 Timothy 4:1-4. Now, let's learn from qualified authorities on tested biblical truth and their assertions in these four core needs for Christian Sports speakers.

Preaching the Gospel of Christ-The Cross

Coaches and athletes have one primary mandate when invited to speak for God. At times, this message mandate may seem to intersect with sharing sports stories or lofty athletic accomplishments. The Apostle Paul, a man of noteworthy status based on his Jewish heritage and training sets a distinctive standard for messengers of God in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, where he claims to know nothing more than Jesus Christ, and him crucified as the primary focus of his message.⁹ Paul's statement is made in the context of his ministry to the Corinthians. W.H. Mare states of Paul that, "Alluding to his visit to Corinth, he is thinking of the initial [preaching] trip recorded in Acts 18:1-18, when the Corinthians first heard the message and believed."¹⁰ Luke, an able historian, doctor, missionary, and theologian,¹¹ states in Acts that Paul spoke regularly in the Jewish

⁹ W.A. Elwell and P.W. Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), 998.

¹⁰ W. Harold Mare, "1 Corinthians." In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 10:198.

¹¹ R.B. Hughes and J.C. Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), 485.

synagogue between his work hours as a tentmaker, and he was “reasoning” with Jews and Greeks about the gospel.¹²

In Paul’s efforts to reason about the gospel, he was not dependent upon “overpowering oratory (*hyperochēn logou*),” meant to express words of esoteric worth. Nor was Paul invested in philosophically wise arguments (*sophia*), intended to convey deep man-driven insights to life.”¹³ Paul could have depended on such skill having been trained in, “secular learning at Tarsus of Cilicia...Hebrew Divine Law at Jerusalem...and Roman Polity.”¹⁴ Perhaps, he did less triumphantly tryout such excellent training on his listeners in Athens in lengthy discourse, which resulted in mockery and only some converts.¹⁵ Although we cannot be certain, it may have been those less than desirable results in Athens that drove Paul to re-focus and perhaps return to the simple gospel teaching from which he previously found greater success in Thessalonica.¹⁶ Later on in Corinth, Paul clearly proclaimed the “mystery” (*mystērion*) of God in the gospel of Christ, as noted in an earlier version of the New International Bible.¹⁷ Most translations (including the updated NIV & ESV) translate the term *mystērion* as “testimony,” instead of “mystery.” “Mystery” points to the unimaginable idea of uniting Greeks (non-Jewish people) with Jews in the body of Christ through the Gospel. The unbelievable mystery of how two incredibly diverse cultures could find

¹² Acts 18:1-18.

¹³ Mare, “1 Corinthians,” 198.

¹⁴ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brow, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Vol. 2, 265.

¹⁵ Acts 17:16-34.

¹⁶ Acts 17:4.

¹⁷ Mare, “1 Corinthians,” 198.

present and eternal union in Christ would have been indeed confusing to Paul's listeners. The message of the cross brought together these two cultures who could accept the same good news from the same God about their same eternity in Heaven through Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the "testimony" of God can be seen as a synonym for the gospel message.¹⁸ Both expressions ("mysterious" as a surprising culture unifying religion and gospel as in "testimony") are valid interpretations, but the more widely excepted expression is "testimony."¹⁹ It was the clarified "testimony" of God, the gospel, which Paul brought to the people of Corinth.

As a preacher, Paul outright acknowledged the person of Christ and his crucifixion as a substitute for man's need to die because of man's own sin²⁰ when he preached in the city of Corinth. This style of speaking was in direct contrast to the normal patterns orators would follow upon entering a new city. The standard protocol for orators or teachers when entering a new city would be to exalt one's own personal accomplishments and to seek to build the foundation of a great reputation.²¹ Conversely, Paul notes that he came with a lack of strength and self-exaltation, but a commitment to expressing weakness, trembling, and fear.²² Paul presented himself so humbly that his detractors accused him of being weak.²³ Further intrigue arose when Paul chose to directly contrast his own weaknesses with God's power. Paul wanted his

¹⁸ R.J. Utey, *Paul's Letters to a Troubled Church: I and II Corinthians* (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2002), 32.

¹⁹ See 1 Corinthians 2:1 in translations such as ESV, NET, NASB, NKJ, NIV.

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:21.

²¹ D.A. Carson, R.T. France, J.A. Motyer, and G.J. Wenham, eds. *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994), 1165.

²² 1 Corinthians 2:3.

²³ 2 Corinthians 10:10, 11:21, 12:7-9.

message to point to God's power and not his own, a power Paul acknowledged he didn't have anyway. He realized that if his wisdom and charm were the focus of his messages, people may be inclined to put their faith in him rather than in God, which would be a perilous mistake.²⁴

Compare Paul's teaching ministry with the apparent ministry of many sports figures who share messages that are heavily reliant on their own accomplishments to wow audiences by self-marketing tactics and overusing moral clichés to keep the audience engaged. I remember listening intently to a former professional athlete speak to an audience for Christ.²⁵ It was clear he had prepared his remarks, and his charismatic personality appealed to the audience. The substance of his introduction was that he was a former professional athlete. The connection to his temporary wealth, athletic elitism, and former fame were the reasons he was to be heard. He went on to comment that he was not sure what he should say to the audience, and he took substantial time to make that blatantly clear. After stumbling around in confusion of what he should say, he found his way toward a few disconnected, but emphatic points about leadership, his professional sports experiences, morality, and yes, God. His message, albeit unclear, elicited audible and physical audience feedback. The audience listened respectfully to the simple, yet entertaining, interaction. Still, the aim of his collective words was indiscernible. The audience offered a lack-luster applause, and he was done. The problem was that he was not personally clear on his duty as a Christian messenger. The

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:17, 2:5

²⁵ Name and event withheld to protect privacy.

outreach event was hosted in a Christian environment by a Christian leader, but the speaker was not necessarily so clearly identified as a Christian by his own message. A message that should absolutely have been centered on the gospel message of Jesus Christ at some point, as the Apostle Paul asserts.

Personalized clichés and man-made wisdom are not the substance of what God intends to use to transform people's lives. Rather, sports figures would do well to follow Paul's example, "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."²⁶ Paul abandoned the wisdom he may have found in himself or others, and he said he was "unashamed" of the gospel.²⁷ The gospel message, as proclaimed by Paul to the people of Colossae, is not only the power for salvation, but also for life and Godly living in the present.²⁸

Paul was not alone in his cross-centered endeavors; Phillip simply proclaimed Christ.²⁹ Jesus Christ himself, as the ultimate example, preached the gospel as the core of his ministry to mankind.³⁰ Jesus goes so far as to reach back through the larger redemptive history to narrate the matters of Old Testament Scripture to the centrality of his own life, which is anchored in the realities of the Gospel.³¹

Can a modern-day speaker do any less in the name of Christian speaking? The answer must be a resounding "No!" Some Christian speakers become known because of

²⁶ 2 Corinthians 4:5.

²⁷ Romans 1:15; 15:20; Acts 16:10; 14:5-7.

²⁸ Colossians 2:6-7.

²⁹ Acts 8:5.

³⁰ Luke 20:1.

³¹ Walter Leifeld, "Luke," in *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 8:1053.

their passionate words of eloquence, emotional stories, and charismatic personalities used to entertain. Instead, they should follow the biblical example and preach the gospel. Otherwise, the life-changing power of the cross of Jesus Christ is emptied because of a speaker's attempt to impress the audience with his own wisdom or personality.³² The message of the cross is an essential mandate for any Christian messenger, including sports icons sent as divine messengers that people might be saved, revived, or renewed at specific one-time events and beyond. The apostle Paul clearly states, "We preach Christ crucified."³³

The question becomes, if the gospel must be proclaimed, what exactly is the gospel message of the cross? It is because "the cross" is the message and the power of God, that we must clarify what the gospel actually is.³⁴ After all, the cross is as the Bible states, "The power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."³⁵

Greg Gilbert has gone to great lengths to clarify the Gospel message through a precise connection of the Gospel to collective teachings of God's word. In his book, *What is the Gospel?*, Gilbert lays out a biblical Gospel for all to understand categorically as God, Man, Christ, Response.³⁶ The message of the Gospel must be tied inextricably to God's word. The Apostle Paul says that the Gospel message is the word of God.³⁷

³² 1 Corinthians 1:17.

³³ 1 Corinthians 1:23.

³⁴ Mark 16:15.

³⁵ Romans 1:16a.

³⁶ Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

³⁷ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

Gilbert explained the gospel with helpful clarity under the categoric headings of God,³⁸ Man,³⁹ Christ,⁴⁰ Response.⁴¹

We will follow Gilbert's simple outline of "God, Man, Christ, Response to look more closely at the meaning of the term Gospel.

God

John Piper makes the argument that the gospel is ultimately all about God. He states that so much of our modern-day teachings about the cross originate from a perspective that we are getting something from God through the gospel. He urges to his readers in *God is the Gospel*, to see God himself as the ultimate joy and prize of the gospel love he makes available.⁴²

Piper argues that the gospel is not essentially that man receives the gifts of God referred to often as forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation, but rather that the gospel gift of love is God himself in all of His beauty for us to enjoy forever.⁴³ Piper suggests that the gospel is about God or else the cross becomes little more than man-centered Salvation. This kind of salvation, likely invites a Christian to a kind of heaven that brings a humanistic euphoria but perhaps without the need for the company of the Glorious King Jesus on his throne to be worshipped and beheld.⁴⁴

³⁸ Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel*, 37-46.

³⁹ Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel*, 47-58.

⁴⁰ Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel*, 59-70.

⁴¹ Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel*, 71-84.

⁴² John Piper, *God Is the Gospel: Meditations on God's Love as the Gift of Himself* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

⁴³ Piper, *God Is the Gospel*, 11.

⁴⁴ Piper, *God Is the Gospel*, 15.

Gilbert, in *What is the Gospel*, asserts that the gospel narrative starts with God.⁴⁵

The primary passage Gilbert depends on is Genesis 1:26-2:17, where God shows himself as the start of all things, and especially of humanity. In so doing, God demonstrates himself to be the sovereign creator God who therefore must be worthy to be surrendered to. This is true not only because of our relationship to him as subjects of his divine creation, but as those who are self-corrupted in the presence of his incorruptibility.

The prophet Isaiah says that even the angels cry out to one another that “God is holy.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah openly states that there is “no one” like God.⁴⁷ God is a self-proclaimed creator, and there is no other God.⁴⁸ God created light, sea, land, moon, sun, birds, fish, and animals. Finally, yet distinctively, God says that he created humanity in his own image, with a specific purpose.⁴⁹ The purpose involved God having a relationship with his unique creation, and God extending his right to govern humanity in how to live.⁵⁰

For humanity (represented as “man” in the Gilbert’s narrative) to do anything other than worshipfully obey and live for God at God’s directive is a lack of fidelity on humanity’s part, and simultaneously where the break exists in God’s perfectly created relationship with man. This lack of surrender is man’s problem; it is man’s sin. This

⁴⁵ Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel*, 40.

⁴⁶ Isaiah 6:3.

⁴⁷ Isaiah 6:3, Jeremiah 10:6.

⁴⁸ Genesis 1:26-28, Isaiah 45:5.

⁴⁹ Genesis 1:26-27.

⁵⁰ Wayne A. Grudem and Jeff Purswell, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 127.

deficiency in surrender to an awesome, holy, creator God who created us to live in this specific surrendered relationship to him, is what established man's woefully debilitated condition, as described in Romans 1-3.

Man's Sin and Its Consequences

Millard Erickson makes a clear case for the source of the problem between man and God, "By rebelling against God it is humans, not God, who break the relationship."⁵¹ People no longer exist in a healthy relationship with God because sin separates people from God.⁵² Sin, the bible teaches results in death, final and eternal separation from God. It costs every human being a relationship with God.⁵³ Erickson's *Christian Theology* states that there are two words that express God's hatred toward sin most succinctly in the New Testament. Those two words are "*thumos*" (anger) and "*orge*" (wrath). "In many cases these words do not merely refer to God's present reaction to sin, but also suggest certain divine actions to come, referring to the greater Judgement of God against man because of man's sin (John 3:36, Romans 1:18)."⁵⁴ It would be problematic enough if people had only a current and broken relationship with God, but Erickson presses further, saying, "Sin has very serious consequences when it comes to the relationship between the sinner and God. These results include divine disfavor, guilt, punishment, and death. Physical death and eternal death flow from the consequences of sin."⁵⁵ The problem is clear; but perhaps less obvious is the solution to the problem.

⁵¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 621.

⁵² Isaiah 59:1-3; Romans 3:23.

⁵³ Romans 6:23.

⁵⁴ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 622.

⁵⁵ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 618.

Given the plethora of religious pursuits that exist today to offer a solution, there is still only one. There is only one solution to this problem for humanity, and communicators of the Gospel must proclaim it.

Christ Is the Solution to Man's Sin

The *Moody Handbook of Biblical Theology* clearly states the solution to the problem of sin:

In discussing the process of salvation [The solution to our problem with God through Christ], the work of Christ is supreme in achieving man's salvation. Primarily, it involves the death of Christ as a substitutionary atonement for sin in securing man's release from the penalty and bondage (of his own sin), therefore meeting the righteous demand of a holy God.⁵⁶

Jesus stated that he is the way, the truth, and the life and that no one comes to the Father except through Him.⁵⁷ Jesus is the perfect God-man because of his sinless life,⁵⁸ and the only way (means through which) to be made right with God.⁵⁹ Jesus Christ offers the free gift of a restored, and forever established, relationship with God. He accomplishes this redemption by sacrificially offering his unstained sinless life in place of our sinful life, and by rising from the dead to prove his power over death.⁶⁰ Jesus offers this free gift without any need for a person to perform good deeds to earn the gift or to do good to keep the gift of love that is offered.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 331.

⁵⁷ John 14:6.

⁵⁸ 1 Peter 2:22.

⁵⁹ John 14:6.

⁶⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

⁶¹ Romans 5:8; 8:28-38.

Our Response is Confession and Repentance

Responding to this invitation comes by way of verbal agreement; an honest affirmation of our belief in these truths about God, man's condition, and Christ as a genuine heartfelt belief that what God's word says is true.⁶² The additional response to these gracious truths is the intertwined turning away and turning toward. In other words, to repent, or turn away from a life of wretched sinfulness, and to turn toward God in a life of obedient godliness in response to God's gift of grace.⁶³ The *Moody Handbook on Theology* notes, however, that to respond to Jesus is not an additional condition per se for salvation,⁶⁴ but instead, a response to the effective call of God.⁶⁵ This new life purpose or response does not play a role in producing what Jesus has given freely, it is simply a life that responds initially, and then perpetually, to the free grace that has been given and received.

This is the gospel in the form of a summary:

- **God** is a Holy God and he created people to live in unbroken relationship with Himself.
- **Man** is separated from God because of man's own sin against God.
- **Christ** offers his perfect life, sacrificial death, and resurrection to repair the relationship with man.

⁶² Romans 10:9-10.

⁶³ Acts 20:21.

⁶⁴ Enns, 331.

⁶⁵ John 6:44.

- All who **Respond** to Christ's offer by confessing belief and concurrently repenting, indeed have eternally good news granted to them through a promised never again broken relationship with God because of Christ.

This gospel message of the cross is one that every Christian sports speaker must know and proclaim.

Character

While some only talk of the idealistic hope of sports figures "walking the walk" of being leaders of great character, Christian sports figures are required to prequalify for speaking engagements by evidence in their lives of "walking the walk" of godly Character.⁶⁶ Character can be tabbed as the moralistic man-made subjective mantra through which a life is regarded as well-lived and well-respected. In contrast, the Bible uses more precise language to define what can be referred to as the kind of God-made objective character required for Christian leadership.

A life of impeccable character is not only described but required for those who lead and speak for God. In 1 Timothy 3:1-7, the Apostle Paul, writing to his young protégé Timothy, gives a foundational and intentional look at the very detailed nature of the character required of spiritual leaders in the local church and we can learn from this example. The Apostle Paul turned to his gifted, younger, accomplice Timothy to carry on his work.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ James 3:12-17, Hebrews 13:7.

⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2.

Paul assigned Timothy the responsibility of leading the church in Ephesus. This church was in need of orderliness in worship services and corrected teaching, both of which the church leaders were responsible to model and teach.⁶⁸ Paul instructed Timothy about what kind of men should be selected as Christian elders to serve as leaders and teachers. This is an appropriate starting place for any Christian leader or speaker. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul draws upon a list of qualifications that were typically applied to political, military, and religious leaders (ie., judges in Jewish sources). The word Paul uses to refer to leaders in the church is “overseers,” and it would have been interchangeable with words used for leaders in the ancient world. The role of an overseer is synonymous with that of elders in the Pastoral Epistles.⁶⁹ An even more definite proof of this is found in Acts 20:17 where we read that Paul sent for the “elders” (*presbyterous*) of the church at Ephesus, but in 20:28, he calls them “overseers.”⁷⁰

The role of church overseer in the church is crucial, and it is important that those who desire to fill it be “above reproach.” This term refers to someone who is irreproachable or blameless in a number of areas of life.⁷¹ Their life must be exemplary both in public and in private so as to more easily stand against charges brought against

⁶⁸ Robert J. Dean, “Timothy.” Edited by Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, Steve Bond, E. Ray Clendenen, and Trent C. Butler. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1598.

⁶⁹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

⁷⁰ Ralph Earle, “1 Timothy.” In *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelein. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981) 11:364.

⁷¹ 1 Timothy 3:1.

them and to effectively lead others. An above reproach leader would be less vulnerable to harmful criticism or scandals.⁷²

In the text of 1 Timothy 3, Paul provides a list of areas in which elders must be blameless. A leader must be the husband of one wife, or a “one-woman” man and live in fidelity or faithfulness to his marriage. The opposite would be a man who behaves as though married to more than one woman. While marriage is not necessarily required for the role, how a man functions in his marriage and family serves as some evidence of his character demonstrated in his private life. For when he has children, finances, decisions, tensions, relationships, trials, grievances, and celebrations to oversee at home, it will be an ample laboratory to observe. The real-life scenarios that burst forth from his home serve as a means of proof or disproof of his ability to lead others effectively in the church beyond his home.⁷³

Also expected of Christian leaders is sober-mindedness, which Louw and Nida says means to be level headed.⁷⁴ Furthermore, this exemplary leader is to be self-controlled, not to be confused with being sober-minded but distinctively noted.⁷⁵ To be self-controlled is to be able to control impulse from mind to body perhaps with a more physically implied evidence over sober-minded, which has more emotional or mental implications. A self-controlled person can control themselves from physically attacking

⁷² Earle, “1 Timothy,” 364.

⁷³ 1 Timothy 3:4-5.

⁷⁴ “νήφω,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 672.

⁷⁵ 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 2:2, 1 Peter 4:7.

someone. A sober-minded person does not think they are a major failure due to a simple mistake, nor do they think they are a perfect leader due to a successful day.

Christians who lead are called to be respectable, in that they win the approval of others. This quality is very much like that of being well thought of by outsiders.⁷⁶ The primary difference in being respected versus well-thought of is the audience.

Respectability is focused on how the audience inside the church views a leader and being well-thought of, in this text, is more so regarding the observations of those outside of the church.⁷⁷ The elevated risk in being thought of poorly by those outside of the church is that it could bring on unnecessary attacks or shame baiting, making it challenging to get out of an antagonistic situation.⁷⁸

Added to the list of important qualifications is hospitality. Hospitality, according to Elwell and Comfort is a willingness to share what you have with others (normally meals within the home or in-home lodging accommodations). This text refers to this type of hospitality with those beyond the inner-circle of family and friends, such as strangers, visitors, outside guests.⁷⁹

It is required that church leaders possess the ability to teach the Bible. This is critical because it is one of their primary jobs.⁸⁰ Interestingly enough, the Bible does not mention with this qualification that a Christian leader in the church must be a highly gifted, winsome, dynamic, and engaging teacher of the word.

⁷⁶ 1 Timothy 3:7.

⁷⁷ Mark 4:11.

⁷⁸ 1 Timothy 3:7.

⁷⁹ Elwell and Comfort, 617.

⁸⁰ Acts 6:4.

It is also required of elders or leaders that they must not be a drunkard.⁸¹

Drunkenness refers to someone who has a pattern of being “given to” wine/alcohol.

Drunkenness, the reality of being under the influence of alcohol, is a blatant display of a lack of self-control regarding alcoholic beverage enjoyment. At what point this begins during the effects of drinking alcohol is debatable. Drunkenness also threatens to violate nearly the full list of previous qualifications, and a number of those to follow. Perhaps, this is why so many God-fearing leaders have vowed to avoid this potential trap over the centuries, dating back to biblical times, as there are numerous mentions of biblical warnings of alcohol’s danger.^{82 83}

Next, the leader is implored to embrace gentleness over and above violence.

Gentleness gives way to avoiding quarrelsomeness, which is not just noted by happenstance, but the following qualification befitting of any leader. Over-aggressive, argumentative, or take-charge leadership can sometimes be applauded in the ways of the world, but it is not God’s way.

Finally, this portion of the list ends with the hope that godly leaders not fall in love with money. To avoid loving money is to find such great contentment in Christ, that whatever monies have been provided by God, or seemingly limited by God’s sovereignty, will always be enough.⁸⁴ The love of money, not money itself, can be a root

⁸¹ 1 Timothy 3:3.

⁸² F.L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford university Press, 2005). s.v. “Nazirites,” (A body of Israelites specially consecrated to the service of God who were under vows to abstain from eating or drinking the produce of the vine...), 1141.

⁸³ Proverbs 31:4-5, 20:1, 21:17, 23:30-35.

⁸⁴ Hebrews 13:5, Philippians 4:10-13.

to evil. This root, an underneath the surface growth of sin in immeasurable ways, can covertly lead someone to wandering away from the faith.⁸⁵

Another trap for Christian leaders is to begin leading others while still falling under the description of “new convert.” To have a life that is not rooted in submission to God and growing in these rudimentary areas of Christianity is reason enough to disqualify someone from going into a leadership role. Arrogance is the pronounced temptation for this new type of Christian. Much like a new employee who quickly rises to a place of prominence is the experience of new believers who begin to serve as Christian leaders or speakers too quickly into their conversion.

In Bible times, moralists of the day advised any worthy men to become statesmen, or skilled, experienced, and respected political leaders.⁸⁶ Perhaps in modern times people could use the same philosophy of the moralists in Paul’s day, and select a candidate for speaking because of their character qualifications. Often, modern day speakers are chosen with secret hopes that the candidate is qualified for the responsibility of pointing others to Jesus.

Granted sports figures are not elders and may not meet the qualifications for such a role. If, however, they are to take on one of the weighty roles of an elder by teaching God’s word to others, it must be duly-noted that the role comes with an earnest warning.⁸⁷ They should have a foundational, evident, Christ-centered lifestyle like that of an elder. All sports have standards for “Hall of Fame” or “MVP” (Most

⁸⁵ 1 Timothy 6:6-10.

⁸⁶ Keener, “1 Timothy 3:1.”

⁸⁷ James 3:1.

Valuable Player) status, and 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 provide a biblical standard for Christian sports leaders. This is the precise, servant-hearted, gold standard given by God for Christian leaders, which mirrors the manifold narrative display of Christ's own humble example.⁸⁸

Perhaps, most amazing about this list of character qualifications for Christian leaders is that they are actually no different from the character or fruitfulness expected of all Christians.⁸⁹ The only difference between a spiritual leader and someone who may not be a spiritual leader is that a spiritual leader "must" have demonstrated an expression of Christian maturity through these stated characteristics, whereas a Christian who is not a spiritual leader is invited and expected to grow in these areas with more plenty of time to mature.

Christ-centered character is the fiber of one's life displayed through the fruit of who they truly are in private and in public.⁹⁰ This is in no way to assume perfection, but to demand increasing maturity expressed with genuine evidence that what is inside of a man will be made known outside and for God's glory. The Christian sports figure's Christ-centered character must align itself with phrases like, Jesus' demand that one must "Deny yourself take up your cross daily and follow me."⁹¹ Or Paul's demands that, "we renounce worldliness and ungodly passions and train yourself to live self-controlled,

⁸⁸ Matthew 20:28, Philippians 2:1-6.

⁸⁹ Galatians 5:22-29, Titus 2, Colossians 1:28-29.

⁹⁰ Galatians 5:22-26.

⁹¹ Luke 9:23-25.

upright, and godly lives,”⁹² and “Immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you.”⁹³

Ultimately, the fruit of the spirit (Christ-centered character) of godly living as a Christian is progressively displayed as an all-inclusive love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control because the Gospel has impacted their lives. This is a high standard for any Christian sports figure, but one that must be held for those who choose to teach others. Hebrews 13:7 states, “Look to those who taught you the word of God, consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” This appropriately limits sports figures who speak to those who are to be emulated or followed because their personal life in Christ is one of verified trustworthiness, albeit an imperfect matter of unfinished spiritual business. The example of a life lived in consistency with the words spoken helps to prevent the person of God, the word of God, and the people of God from being disrespected.⁹⁴

If Christian sports figures were trained to have Christ-centered character that backed up the Christ-Centered message, we would have truly respected Christian coaches and athletes who genuinely “walked the walk” before, after, and during their efforts to “talk the talk.” The results could be outstanding and like never seen before to have such a godly influence come out of the realm of sports to impact the world for Christ.

⁹² Titus 2:11-13.

⁹³ Ephesians 5:3.

⁹⁴ Titus 2:5-8.

Capable to Handle Scripture

Christian sports figures who know and share the Gospel, who live character-filled lives consistent with Scripture, and who desire to be used by God as true biblical messengers, must also be trained to more adequately study God's word. While we can attribute much of Jesus' ministry to his divine status, there is also something to be said for the humble faithfulness of his upbringing and sharpening in the synagogue that played a role in preparing him for his teaching ministry.⁹⁵ Jesus was trained to study truth.⁹⁶

The apostle Paul was also trained to study the bible. Paul's father, a known Pharisee,⁹⁷ was thought to be well-to do, which lends itself to the well-ordered religious home in which Paul would have been raised and trained.⁹⁸ Paul was thoroughly trained in the truths of Old Testament Scripture.⁹⁹ The foundation of Old Testament truth certainly aided Paul's ability to understand the depths of the Law and Gospel truths that he expounds with precision in Romans.

Then, of course, the disciples were schooled by Jesus himself for years. They were trained in the truths of the Law, and they became increasingly discerning in the matters of the Messiah, The Kingdom of God, and applicable living. They were tutored on how to interpret the law, and they were trained in how to understand their missional mandate.

⁹⁵ Luke 2:39-52.

⁹⁶ Paul I. Achtemeier, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1985), 674.

⁹⁷ Acts 23:6.

⁹⁸ Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace: The Lectures of Alva J. McClain* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1973), 11-12.

⁹⁹ Acts 22:3, 5:34.

In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul told Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”¹⁰⁰ Paul was concerned about the intrusion of false teaching in the church and the context from which he exhorted Timothy was thought to be from prison. He was headed to his persecuted end for preaching the Gospel.¹⁰¹ The premier way to fight against false teaching was to be a true student of the word.¹⁰²

In 2 Timothy 2:14-19, Paul tells Timothy to remind the church, and more specifically, to “charge” or “warn” ¹⁰³ them not to aimlessly fight about words, because it is detrimental to those who hear the arguments.¹⁰⁴ Paul develops this matter in more detail, but first he gives a presentation of how to avoid shame and demonstrate readiness to be a worker for God. He tells Timothy to do his best and to serve with an element of zeal v.15. He also urged Timothy to show himself to God as an approved (tested) worker for God. Based on what Paul has formerly written in 1 Timothy 3, a part of being tested as a Christian leader included having the temperament and self-control required to avoid unnecessary disputes.¹⁰⁵

In addition, Paul emphasizes a testing that diminishes the potential of “shame” (“*anepaischynton*” in Greek used only here in the New Testament),¹⁰⁶ in regards to being able to rightly (“accurately” in the NET translation) handle the word of truth. The

¹⁰⁰ 2 Timothy 2:15.

¹⁰¹ Elwell and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 1261.

¹⁰² Elwell and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 1262.

¹⁰³ “διαμαρτύρομαι,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 233.

¹⁰⁴ 2 Timothy 2:14.

¹⁰⁵ 1 Timothy 3:3.

¹⁰⁶ Earle, “2 Timothy,” 402.

most literal expression of rightly handling the word of truth would be to cut “straightly.”¹⁰⁷ The ability to accurately divide the word of God must be accompanied with a zeal to do one’s best in this regard.

The next few verses explain why this correct handling of God’s word is so important as Paul refers to what is to be avoided or “shunned.”¹⁰⁸ Paul explains that irreverent babble has weighty consequences. This babbling is a loud version of verbally causing something highly revered (referring to the teachings of the Word of God) to become associated aimlessly with common place discussions, and furthermore, to be wrong about it.¹⁰⁹ The irreverent babble, as well as the aforementioned fighting about words, has a negative effect on others, such as leading to even more ungodliness than that in which they were already entangled.¹¹⁰ Much worse is that the loud erred talk or false teaching would spread excessively like a flesh eating cancerous disease.¹¹¹

Not at all shy about naming the targets of his accusations, Paul boldly names a couple of examples of those who have swerved away from the right handling of God’s word and into false teaching. Hymenaeus and Philetus were teaching falsely about the resurrection.¹¹² They taught that the resurrection was allegorical and spiritual at best in

¹⁰⁷ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. Vol. 2, 425. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

¹⁰⁸ 2 Timothy 2:16 in Earle, “2 Timothy,” 402.

¹⁰⁹ “βεβηλόω,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 173.

¹¹⁰ 2 Timothy 2:16.

¹¹¹ 2 Timothy 2:17 in Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, s.v. “γάγγραινα,” in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (one who always has a halter on himself), 271.

¹¹² 1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 2:17-18.

having already taken place.¹¹³ As a result, they denied the promises of Christ and of Paul to the church of Corinth, which taught that the resurrection is physical, and spiritual, and still forthcoming.¹¹⁴ The false teaching caused some to wrongly question their faith in God and his promised resurrection. Not to fear says Paul (v.19), God's foundation (His church) and the seal upon which it exists will stand.¹¹⁵ The seal is primarily God's omniscience or knowledge of those who really are his and those who are not.¹¹⁶ Those who have truly received God's love cannot be taken away from him.¹¹⁷ Secondly, the seal of those who will stand is evidenced by any who call upon the name of the Lord (in belief on the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation Romans 10:9-10) to turn away from a life of living as slaves to sin. Zealous studying of God's word was a basic requirement for Timothy to show himself approved, and simultaneously, for him to be able to reject false teaching.

All Christians are invited to be students of truth to better discern the difference between good and evil, right and wrong, or truth and falsehood.¹¹⁸ Today's teachers of truth must be no less taught to be students of Scripture. Foolishness at best allows sports figures excellence in athletic experiences to be their only true training curriculum prior to the public handling of biblical truth. Of course, Church attendance during the off-season, pre-game in-season chapel, and periodic midweek surface level devotional

¹¹³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991; repr., 1994).

¹¹⁴ John 14:1-6; 1 Corinthians 15.

¹¹⁵ Duane A. Litfin, "2 Timothy." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, edited by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 2:755.

¹¹⁶ Nahum 1:7, John 10:14, 1 Corinthians 8:3.

¹¹⁷ Romans 8:31-39.

¹¹⁸ Acts 17:10-12.

studies do not provide enough true preparation to understand Scripture well enough to teach others. However, a genuine and necessary studiousness of the Bible would afford sports figures with an understanding of truth to be the very substance of the talks they give. Sports figures who follow Jesus can be most impactful for Jesus when they are capable to study and feast upon His word for themselves. Being able to handle God's truth enables them to be better teachers of truth for those with whom they speak.

Now, after the attempts at making a biblical case for sports figures to understand the critical nature of the cross of Christ being proclaimed, the importance of Christ-centered character in their own lives, and the need to capably handle God's truth, there is one final component of training to consider. Sports figures can be prepared to deliver clear word-centered messages.

Clear "Word" Centered Messages

At this point, it may seem that a Christian leader in sports has done enough to prepare himself or herself to speak of God and God's word. What additional training could be expected for a speaker beyond having met the faithful standards of Gospel clarity, healthy character, and studious Bible study habits? There is one more area of training suggested by the Apostle Paul himself. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-4 to "Preach the word" of God as a primary pursuit of his ministry life. The idea is that knowing the Gospel and being able to adequately dissect the word is not enough, without also communicating messages that are clearly from the Bible:

It would be difficult to see how Paul could have made his **charge** (or command) to Timothy any weightier (cf. 1 Tim. 5:21; 6:13). He adjured Timothy, not only **in the name of God and of Christ**, but in the light of the coming judgment (Acts 10:42), Christ's return (*epiphaneian*, **appearing**; cf. 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:8; Titus

2:13), and the establishment of **His** millennial **kingdom**. The content of Paul's charge represents the central thrust of every minister's task: Timothy was to **preach the Word**. All the weight of verse 1 bears on this entreaty.¹¹⁹

The Word that is to be preached is not merely referencing the word(s) in general that flow from the preacher's mouth, but actual truth (2 Tim. 4:4):

It is called simply ὁ λόγος=*the 'Word'*, for no misunderstanding would be possible among Christians: Mt 13:20–23 (the Word is to be joyfully received); Mk 2:2; 4:14–20 (the Word is to be preached), 33 (the Word is transmitted through stories); 8:32 (the Word used in rebuking); Lk 1:2 (the Word is handed down); 8:12f, 15 (the Word is to be held on to); Ac 6:4 (the Word is to have a distinctive ministry); 8:4 (the Word is to be preached by many); 10:36 (it is to be Gospel centered); 11:19 (the Word can invite persecution); 17:11 (it can be received with eagerness); 18:5 (ministers are to be occupied with the Christocentric Word); Phil 1:14 (the Word is to be spoken fearlessly); Col 4:3 (God opens doors for the Word); Js 1:21ff (The Word brings salvation); 1 Pt 2:8 (the Word is authoritative); 1J 2:7 (the Word is anchored in time tested truth).¹²⁰

The heralding or preaching act was a serious one, as Paul's forceful insertion into Timothy's ministry life demands.

In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul expounds on the circumstances in which preaching the Word is necessary. Unequivocally, he says the preaching of the Word is needed all the time, or in all seasons. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown put it this way in the *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*:

Whether they regard your speaking as seasonable or unseasonable. "Just as the fountains, though none may draw from them, still flow on; and the rivers, though none drink of them, still run; so must we do all on our part in speaking, though none give heed to us" [CHRYSOSTOM, *Homily*, 30, vol. 5., p. 221]. I think with CHRYSOSTOM, there is included also the idea of times whether seasonable or unseasonable *to Timothy himself*; not merely when convenient, but when inconvenient to thee, night as well as day (Ac 20:31), in danger as well as in safety, in prison and when doomed to death as well as when at large, not only in

¹¹⁹ Litfin, "2 Timothy," 757.

¹²⁰ "ὁ λόγος," in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 600.

church, but everywhere and on all occasions, whenever and wherever the Lord's work requires it.¹²¹

Paul continued in 2 Timothy 4:2 to build upon the authority of God's Word that he referenced back in 2 Timothy 3:16. He repeated the ideals of the Bible being used for reproving, rebuking, exhorting. These three imperatives are bound together regarding preaching the Bible. The Word is a useful tool for reproving the hearer, in that an attempt is made to correctively express strong disapproval of sin and additionally to state that someone has done wrong.¹²² The biblical message also involves rebuking in order to prevent a sinful action from occurring, or to bring the already occurring sinful action to an end.¹²³ Last, but not least, Paul commands the use of exhortation to be used in biblical messages in order to console and encourage the listener in Christ.¹²⁴

Warren Wiersbe put it this way, "True preaching is the explanation and application of Bible doctrine. Anything else is just religious speechmaking."¹²⁵ Clearly, preaching the word is well beyond a mere speech, but perhaps more of a dedicated lifestyle of preaching. Not all preaching has the same outcome. Following Paul's approach, we see that for some occasions, a proclamation is for reproof; other times, it is a rebuke; and still others, exhortation. Certainly, any Word-centered message may include all three,

¹²¹ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Vol. 2, 429.

¹²² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, s.v. "ἐλέγχω," in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (one who always has a halter on himself), 435.

¹²³ "ἐπιτιμάω," in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 384.

¹²⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, s.v. "παρακαλέω," in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (one who always has a halter on himself), 305.

¹²⁵ W.W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 254.

but Paul says that every message must include complete patience with thorough teaching of what is being preached.

It would be well enough to have Timothy simply just obey Paul's commands. However, Paul explains the warning for why such preaching of the word is so vital.¹²⁶ Paul is concerned about an approaching problem, that indeed is already somewhat present. Paul believes that there is a time coming when people will not put up with the preaching of "healthy" doctrine. Their distaste for the word being preached will be coupled with their own efforts to gather, or "heap up," the many available teachers who will tell them what they want to hear,¹²⁷ instead of the word of truth.¹²⁸ Their final outcome is that they turn away from listening to the kind of truth Paul commands Timothy to preach, and they wander into myths (a legendary story or account, normally about supernatural beings, events, or cultural heroes, and in the New Testament always with an unfavorable connotation—'legend, myth, tale, story, fable').¹²⁹

All too often, messages that come from the lips of Christian sports figures address themes that are deeply immersed in outright false or somewhat incomplete teaching. The prosperity gospel is one such false example of the "myths" to which Paul might refer.¹³⁰ The prosperity gospel is the wrong belief that if a person has faith in God, that God will give worldly success (including championship seasons) and make all

¹²⁶ 2 Timothy 4:3.

¹²⁷ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, s.v. "ἐπισωρεύω," in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (one who always has a halter on himself), 289.

¹²⁸ Litfin, "2 Timothy," 758.

¹²⁹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, s.v. "μῦθος," in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (one who always has a halter on himself), 389–390.

¹³⁰ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Peter H. Davids, et al., *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), 186.

your problems go away. This false gospel teaches that Jesus is merely a “genie in a bottle” to help people get more of what they want in life and to avoid getting what they don’t want. The primary problem with this teaching is that the Bible doesn’t support this message. As a result, a different “gospel” is presented.

Recently, an NFL Quarterback, whose name will be withheld, aligned himself with the prosperity gospel. He openly states in a public interview, as an example for all to follow, that God will bring him professional athletic success because of his faith. He seems to be a genuinely nice man, and everyone makes mistakes as speakers. Sometimes, they unknowingly make theological missteps, quote Scripture out of context, or are simply incorrect in some of the points in the messages they share. They lack training in both simple exegesis which they need to interpret the biblical text and in basic homiletics which they need to create a sermon based on that text and deliver the results in a clear and accurate manner.

The comments that follow regarding this interview are not intended to be condemning, but they are necessary to highlight how sports figures might be able to serve even more faithfully. After all, I too once spent about half of a decade giving countless messages as a Christian sports figure without any training.

The Quarterback’s optimism was great, but he ultimately demonstrates an untrained mind on the teachings of Scripture. His self-focused spiritualization fails to realize the incredible hardship inherent in the lives of remarkably faithful followers of Christ in centuries past, multitudes of those in present day, and scores of those to

come.¹³¹ It is for reasons such as these errant teachings from the untrained sports figures that I have often wondered if the reason for Christian sports figures increasingly being “interviewed” as opposed to being keynote speakers or guest preachers is to allow the host to avoid the false claims they are prone to express during their undirected musings.

It is not God’s heart for those who listen to the spiritual guidance of sports figures to avoid checking their Bibles to see if what they are hearing is as true to God as it is made to be true by the speaker, or their own listening ears.¹³² While some might side-step these concerns in light of the number of people who are moved or “saved” through these messages, caution is necessary to ascertain what listeners are moved by, and from what or whom they have been saved. It could well be true that the prosperity gospel message attempts to save people from pessimism, but not from the effects of sin or the necessary wrath of God.

Sports figures need to apply an authentic sense of tenacious surrender to the study of Scriptural truth with the same rigors applied to the sports training that they endure. Then, they will more aptly discern biblical truths, and therefore, have the best opportunity to translate those truths to others through the messages that they proclaim. If sports leaders can handle the study of Scripture, the errors they make in the assertion of truth could be avoided.

¹³¹ Luke 9:23; 2 Timothy 3:12; 2 Corinthians 6:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:2; Hebrews 10:32-33; Romans 8:17; John 15:18-21.

¹³² Acts 17:11-12, 2 Timothy 4:3, Mark 9:42.

Paul was clear about the importance of clarity as he stressed the importance of teaching, proclaiming, and communicating biblical truth free of gimmicks, fan-fare, and so-called human wisdom. In exchange for such weak attempts to communicate, Paul advocated for simple, but clear and accurate biblical truth.

When Apollos was preaching and witnessing for Christ in the city of Ephesus he did so with powerful eloquence and a knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. But because he had some theological inadequacies when it came to the Christian message, Priscilla and Aquila tutored him in the ways of Christ. Apollos was well trained in the Scriptures, and it was evident. He was passionate about the matters of Jesus. But there was something about his teaching ministry of Christ that lacked a degree of accuracy and that concerned Priscilla and Aquila enough that they invested the time to train him. As much as Apollos knew, he had not been informed about the details of baptism beyond the baptism of John the Baptist. Apollos had a good message and a powerful preaching style, but a message that was incomplete.¹³³

Unfortunately, sports figures seem rarely, if ever, corrected for their biblically disconnected or misguided messages. Christian speakers, posed as Christian sports figures, today need to uphold this standard of speaking and in humility embrace the need for greater training. Apollos had to be better trained to better understand how to communicate more accurately in his messages, even though he was revered as a remarkably gifted evangelist and apologist.¹³⁴ John the Baptist was further trained as he

¹³³ Acts 18:24-28.

¹³⁴ Acts 18:24-28,19:1; 1 Corinthians 1:12-13, 3:6.

encountered Christ.¹³⁵ Christian sports figures who avail themselves to teaching others must also be trained in truth, so that their messages are clearly anchored in truth from God's word.

Correction for clarity sake happens everywhere, and in every sphere of life. Certainly, Christian sports figures are accustomed to correction in post-game review sessions (even the media and fans eagerly help with that, invited or not), so that they are more in line with the intended game-winning goals of their athletic efforts. Likewise, Scripture offers correction for them to communicate clear biblical messages. They can have an incredible impact if they are willing to receive correction from those equipped to provide it.

Paul was nothing, if not exemplary, in clearly connecting his message to biblical truth. He was committed to, "Testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." He was consistently, "Testifying to the Gospel of the Grace of God."¹³⁶ Early in his ministry, Paul went about simply saying, "Jesus is the Son of God."¹³⁷ His message was clear and connected to biblical truth. It was consistent with proclaiming the Gospel message of the cross.

First Thessalonians 2:1-6 states:

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God

¹³⁵ Elwell and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 729; Matthew 3:13-15.

¹³⁶ Acts 20:21-24.

¹³⁷ Acts 9:20.

who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

Paul, and his fellow ministers, brought a clear biblical message. They put aside attempts to focus on pleasing people, gaining from people, or flattering people. Instead, they focused on pleasing God.

Sports figures who tend to focus on entertaining crowds, negotiating a high speakers fee, and overly focusing on the audience could learn a lot from Paul. They could learn a lot about not tampering with God's word to make the Bible fit their message, but to speak messages that are clearly from God's word and fitting their own story into God's greater redemptive story.¹³⁸

The challenge for Christian sports figures occurs when they seek to mix their personal experience and message of sports with God's message of truth in a way that is confusing to what their true message is. Their primary story should be God's clear story as laid out in Scripture. It should be simple, clear, and biblically consistent, without the inconsistent connections between their championships and God's story of redemption. Historically, there has been no known means to fix these haphazard efforts, but perhaps only a covert litmus test for correction that involves less invitations to speak, poorly influenced people, unsatisfied crowds. However, we no longer have to be subjected to these often-inconsistent results.

¹³⁸ 2 Corinthians 4:2.

Paul crafted messages that were not about being clever, but much about being clear. Messages should be clearly dependent on God's word. God's word has the ability to do the work of inspiring people and convicting people. People are also transformed by the renewing truths that are found in the pages of Scripture.¹³⁹ "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."¹⁴⁰ If God's word is that effective, and it is, sports figures need to be taught how to clearly base their messages on it.

Conclusion

Speaking about the cross (the gospel), living out exemplary Christian character, learning to capably handle Scripture as faithful students, and constructing clear biblical messages are all essential for Christian sports leaders who speak. These are standards set by biblical principles expected of any Christian leader, including the sports figures who proclaim Christian messages from the local high-school stars all the way up to Super Bowl champion celebrants. Athletes have enormous influence, and with great influence, comes great responsibility: "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more."¹⁴¹ Sports figures can grow to comprehend the significance of having a cross-centered clarity, a Christ-centered character, an ability to study biblical truth, and a

¹³⁹ Romans 12:2.

¹⁴⁰ 2 Timothy 3:16.

¹⁴¹ Luke 12:48b.

message that is biblically clear and based on what God's word says. In fact, they must.

But it is just as true that someone must invest the time and effort to help them do so.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Often, well-known Christian athletes and coaches are invited to keynote speaking engagements due to the grandeur of their sports accomplishments. Many event planners, evangelistically-minded leaders, and pastors have invited Christian sports stars to speak at their Christian events. People are beginning to take note of the increasing demand on Christian sports figures to speak at various types of Christian gatherings. Some observers have problems with many Christian sports figures' gospel beliefs, character, incapability to accurately handle the Bible, and their unclear messages.

Athlete Promotions, a sports celebrity booking agency founded in 1999, is fully aware of these demands on Christian Athletes:

Christian athletes have grown in popularity with the rise of players like Tim Tebow, Josh Hamilton and Jeremy Lin. They both have recognized that their faith has been a major part of their success. The market has responded with endorsement deals as well as an increased demand in Christian Athlete speaking engagements. The sports world continues to evolve and in return many companies have had to adjust their marketing strategies which have opened the doors for Christian athletes. Notable Christian Athletes like David Robinson and George Foreman have become role models through their services off the field. A fitting example of this is David Robinson who gives 10% of his income to the David Robinson Foundation which provides scholarships to youth in San Antonio.¹

Christian sports figures proclaiming their faith is not a new phenomenon. Tom Krattenmaker, an acknowledged expert in the field of Christianity being expressed in the

¹ "Hire a Christian Athlete for a Corporate Appearance," Athlete Promotions.com, 2015, <http://www.athletepromotions.com/christian-athletes-appearance-booking-agent.php> (accessed August 24).

public square, in his book *Onward Christian Athletes*, confirms the highlighting of Christian athletes publicly. He states, for instance, that Tim Tebow was not the originator of praying on the field of competition as a means of proclaiming his faith.

Krattenmaker says that Herbert Lusk began the practice:

Lusk is the one who started it all with that fateful display in the Giants end zone back in the 1970s. Lusk is right-his act of kneeling in the end zone was contagious, and barely a pro football or baseball game passes today without Christian combatants praying at the mound or home plate, pointing triumphantly to the heavens after a touchdown or home run, or praising their God in post-game interviews.

Lusk is an evangelical, an adherent to and promoter of the conservative branch of Christian belief that dominates religious practice and expression in our major professional sports leagues. It has, among its principal tenets, the conviction that believers are called upon to spread the good news of the Bible so that others, too, may accept the Lordship of the savior, Jesus Christ, and thus earn their salvations.²

Tom Krattenmaker is not the only one to have taken notice of the platform existing for coaches and athletes to proclaim their faith. The Fellowship of Christian Athletes has more than 1,200 staff who can respond to calls and inquiries for Christian sports figures to speak at local events.³ Even with a large national staff coverage for each state and local area, Nancy Hedrick, Executive Vice President of Communications and Marketing for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) at the FCA National Support Center in Kansas City, Missouri, continues to receive and estimated 5-10 requests per month for Christian sports figures to speak at Christian events across the country.

² Tom Krattenmaker, *Onward Christian Athletes: Turning Ballparks into Pulpits and Players into Preachers* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 13.

³ "2014 Ministry Report," Fellowship of Christian Athletes, <http://2014.fca.org/> (accessed August 28, 2017).

A closer look at the Fellowship of Christian Athletes ministry reveals speaker requests are not exclusive to the professional ranks. Rather, many requests for sports figures to speak are filled by non-professional sports leaders. The FCA has assessed the personal speaking demand amongst their own staff and arrived at a very clear conclusion that most of the FCA staff themselves are former high school coaches and athletes, with some college experience, while only a select few have performed amongst the professional ranks.

After assessing the demands for Christian sports figures to speak since 1954, FCA administration concluded they needed to train all incoming FCA staff through a public speaking expert by the name of Alex Hoffler, Executive Director and Principal Trainer at Mills Wyck Communications. Hoffler coaches FCA staff to speak more effectively with greater clarity, receptibility, and overall impact. The FCA exists in 45 countries and has a staff team overseeing over 10,000 Bible study meetings (often weekly meetings) where they are often invited to speak.⁴ In addition, the FCA staff oversee more than 400 sports Christian camps each year, where they often play key roles in speaking.⁵ The FCA ministry overwhelmingly affirms the service of Christians sports figures' (current and former coaches and athletes) roles of service as most of the FCA speaking opportunities take place at local high schools, and secondarily at colleges.

Speaking expectations are not limited to the masses of those solely in Christian ministry as a vocation. Stephen Hargis, a reporter for the *Chattanooga Times Free*

⁴ "2014 Ministry Report."

⁵ "What Is FCA," Fellowship of Christian Athletes, <http://www.fca.org/what-is-fca> (accessed August 28, 2017).

Press, reports that the number of high school football coaches who think preaching Christianity is part of the game plan isn't just a single individual or even a handful of people. The following comments illustrate coach's commitments to proclaim their faith in Christ:

"We as coaches fail if we only teach football, so we try to set an example of how a Christian man handles any situation," Ridgeland High coach Mark Mariakis said. "I want the kids to remember that example more than anything they learn on the football field." Furthermore, Hargis noted, "... 32 coaches in Tennessee, Georgia or Alabama professed to be Christian [and] are admitting to illegally preaching Christianity to their players (and who knows how many didn't admit it)."

Another coach clarifies his identity as far greater than a job title,

"I'm not a coach who's a Christian, I'm a Christian coach," said [coach] Barnhart. "To me, my faith is a big part of who I am, so it's going to be a big part of what I do as a coach."⁶

The daring dedication of sports figures teaching about Christ is documented, real, and expected. At this juncture, it is important to take stock of what some experts have to say about some specific areas of concern with regard to these would-be Gospel preachers, particularly as it relates to the importance of the Christian sports figure's clarity about the gospel, character in Christ, capability to handle Scripture, and their teaching of clear biblical messages. The voices of elite practitioners in their fields of training Christian speakers, combined with the current display of poor examples of Christians sports figures, further highlights the grievous lack of training that results in

⁶ Hemant Mehta, "Why Are So Many High School Football Coaches Preaching to Their Athletes," October 1, 2013, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2013/10/01/why-are-so-many-high-school-football-coaches-preaching-to-their-athletes/> (accessed August 28, 2017).

confusion about the Gospel message among those influenced by Christian sports leaders.

Cross-Centered Clarity

Gospel clarity has been sadly neglected by many of the Christian athletes and coaches who speak for God. It seems all too normative to hear a message from a Christian man of great physical stature speaking of himself and his success in sports. The speech usually includes the idea that everyone can have earthly success and less failure through Christ. Often, the call for seeking a relationship with Christ is inseparably interjected at the end of such a message. This combination of offering a forgiving relationship with Jesus Christ with automatic “magic-like” earthly success would be at least a part of the biblically unfounded message of the “prosperity” gospel, or as it is also called, the “health and wealth” gospel. All too often, these types of messages plague speeches, news reports, pulpits, banquet halls, and sports arena faith nights.

The problem with the prosperity gospel is that it offers false promises connected to Christian conversion. It promises that a person will have a better life materially and physically because of the choice to believe, and to have enough faith in Christ. Indeed, the Bible communicates and promises access to peace,⁷ joy in the Lord,⁸ and greater wisdom in this life now for Christians.⁹ God also promises his presence for those who are his disciples.¹⁰ These promises can make our worldly existence better, but they are

⁷ Philippians 4:7.

⁸ John 15:7-11.

⁹ James 1:5

¹⁰ Matthew 28:19-20.

no guarantee of a realized American Dream of health and wealth. Rather, the Holy Scriptures teach greater hardship,¹¹ persecution,¹² and hatred for those who are in Christ from those who are against Christ.¹³ David Waters addressed this issue:

Being seen as gospel preachers of “personal prosperity” [Christian] athletes have made themselves known for self-made theology. “It wasn’t me swinging that bat,” Boston Red Sox Outfielder Trot Nixon said after hitting a game-winning home run in the 2003 American League playoffs. “It was the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁴

Krattenmaker again brings his expertise to the topic by commenting on his research, “Prosperity Gospel themes...have flourished in many Christian circles.”¹⁵ The Cross of Christ discussed in the previous chapter does not need to be confused with the falsehood of the prosperity Gospel. Instead, sports speakers need to be trained to study the Bible so they can avoid confusion and add clarity to their messages about the Christian Cross.

Seminaries around the country provide premier resources to help messengers keep the message of the Cross at the heart of every message. Bryan Chapell’s *Christ-Centered Preaching* is one such resource whose pages maintain the idea that the power of the word as taught is manifested in the person and redemptive work of Christ sacrificed and risen from the dead for all who believe. Chapell argues for a careful concise discipline of preaching Christ. He seeks to develop in preachers a mature understanding of biblical truth that keeps the text connected to the larger redemptive

¹¹ James 1:2.

¹² 2 Timothy 3:12.

¹³ Luke 21:17.

¹⁴ David Waters, “Religion,” *Reading Eagle Newspaper*, Feb. 5, 2005, B11.

¹⁵ Krattenmaker, *Onward Christian Athletes*, 109.

narrative themes of the bible. This kind of training then decreases the ability to falsely substitute “health and wealth” theism as the message of the cross. Chapell helps would-be preachers side-step efforts that force temporally-focused, moralistic, man-centered messages onto biblical texts, and helps them find power in the Gospel centrality of the word, realizing that the word is Christ and Christ is the word.¹⁶ An accurate understanding can better lead a messenger to communicate a message through the clear Gospel lens of God, Man, Christ, Response says author Greg Gilbert.

As more fully explained in chapter 2 of this thesis, the perfect and Holy God who created man in His image expects his creation to live in perfect submitted relationship with Him and to his laws.¹⁷ Man broke that relationship because of his own sin.¹⁸ Christ offers a restored relationship with God and salvation from consequences of sin.¹⁹ Responding to this free offer is man’s responsibility by confessing his belief in Christ’s gift and living a life of repentance because of the gift of Christ Himself. This message of God, Man, Christ, Response offers a cross-centered clarity that can help sports figures present a clear and consistent biblical message.²⁰ Using this model to teach the Cross takes preparation and practice, providing a means to inform and correct the speaking done by some Christian sports figures today.

At the regional level of FCA, I witnessed a movement in 2012 that impacted all of the nation’s staff. Some FCA staff are former coaches and athletes who serve as

¹⁶ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 19.

¹⁷ Isaiah 6:3; Genesis 1:26-31, 2:15-17.

¹⁸ Romans 3:23, 6:23.

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

²⁰ Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

Christian speakers at various events. Tim Johnson, the FCA Vice President for Midwest Region, decided to read a book with his staff about the Gospel (*What is the Gospel?*, by Greg Gilbert) and invited dialogue amongst his staff about the importance of clarity when talking about the gospel.²¹ Through Johnson's leadership, the gospel became the center of multiple discussions, training, and equipping along the lines of the necessity of the clarity of the gospel message being shared across the FCA Midwest region. He led the entire FCA Midwest regional staff, and later the national FCA Staff, toward re-centering the hearts of Christian sports leaders around the foundation of the gospel as the core message and truth that is ultimately needed to encourage and strengthen faithful service to Christ.

There is much more work to be done to build on efforts to equip leaders who are sports figures with the clear gospel message.

Character Reflecting Christ

A problem for Christian coaches and athletes is that they become role models with so many followers who are ready to mimic their publicly displayed lifestyles. When sports figures become speakers they inadvertently, if not overtly, affirm their own readiness to be a role model for their fans. Athletes and their coaches invoke in us a fervent desire to be like them.

Christian athletes and coaches who choose to be Christian speakers must submit to the rigors of disciplining themselves spiritually, much like Paul trained himself with

²¹ Tim Johnson has an extensive career in athletics as a Wrestling Broadcaster, a former coach, USAW Administrator, Director of 1984 Olympic Games for Wrestling. He has been a "voice" for College wrestling broadcasting for ESPN, the Big Ten Network, and Iowa Public Television for 26 years.

great intensity that he might not be become disqualified to preach to others.²² Paul understood he needed disciplined character if he was to preach Christianity to others. He knew his public status would tempt others to lift him up as an example.²³ Mark Galli noted a concern that demonstrates society's regard for athletes:

Our desire to lift them up as models of athleticism, morality—and religion—goes way back. The ancient Olympics were not merely athletic events but also religious festivals. As the ancient historian Strabo put it, the Olympian games were considered "the greatest games in the world." Indeed, they were the Super Bowls of the ancient world. When we see that power and grace in the field of play—well, it is a thing of wonder. We're witnessing human glory (that glory that is just a little less than the angels—Psalm 8) ... When we witness such a sight, it's almost impossible not to hope that this same human being might be a specimen of excellence in other arenas. Thus, is born in us the desire for the athlete to be a moral role model.²⁴

While it is true that we should not put men above God, we are expected to follow the example of those who are positioned as speakers and leaders in service for Christ.²⁵ They are called to tell us what they have known to be true in a way that points us to Christ after their own example, as imperfect as it may be.²⁶

Yet, several glaring examples exist of athletes who have missed the mark and disqualified themselves as speakers and leaders due to their lack of God-glorifying lifestyles. Before mentioning details, it is important to remember that God deeply desires to forgive the sins in all of us, but he also expects Christians who are forgiven by God's grace to live an increasing pattern of Godliness and repentance if they are to

²² 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

²³ 1 Corinthians 1:12.

²⁴ Mark Galli, "Christian Athletes Are Not Role Models," *Christianity Today*, January 31, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-web-only/christian-athletes-are-not-role-models.html> (accessed August 28, 2017).

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:1.

²⁶ Hebrews 13:7.

teach others about God's life transforming love. If an aspiring teacher's life is not being transformed by Christ, he is not ready to point others to being transformed by Christ, lest he lead others astray and bring great judgment from God against himself (Matthew 18:6).²⁷

First, take Ray Lewis, whom sports writer Frank Deford described like this,

He is not, shall we say, quite the exemplary family man, having sired six children with a variety of women. He was indicted for murder in the year 2000, ... pled guilty to obstruction of justice...add to that the strong evidence, as reported in this week's Sports Illustrated, that he took a banned substance earlier this season, and you get the picture. Or I should say the lack of a picture of moral rectitude.²⁸

Ray Lewis, nicknamed the "Minister of Defense," is almost as well-known for speaking about Christ as he is for playing football. Unfortunately, his continuously unmentionable lifestyle of submerging himself in sin obliterates his credibility to preach Christ to others, as the very Christ he speaks of seems to not have drawn him to true life changing repentance. This contradiction brings into clear view the integrity of both the messenger and his message.

Second, an article written by Chris Dufresne about professing Christian speakers of the likes of former NFL football player Eugene Robinson and Boxing Champion Evander Holyfield stressed the tension of "Men of God" who are Christian athletes, but do not practice what they preach.²⁹ It was the week of another Super Bowl. A ministry

²⁷ James 3:1, Titus 1:5-9, James 3:13-18; Matthew 18:6.

²⁸ Galli, "Christian Athletes."

²⁹ Chris Dufresne, "When Athletes Don't Practice What They Preach," Los Angeles Times, February 21, 1999, <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/feb/21/sports/sp-10367> (accessed August 28, 2017); Terry Rifkin, "God in the Press Box," *Religion in the News* 2, no.1 (Spring 1999), http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/rinvol2no1/God_in_Pressbox.htm (accessed August 28, 2017).

honored Atlanta Falcon safety Eugene Robinson with the Bart Starr Award for recognition of his high moral character. Sadly, only hours after receiving the award, Robinson was arrested and charged for solicitation of physical intimacy from an undercover police officer in Miami. For Evander Holyfield, it was not the week of the Super Bowl, but the week of his second wife giving birth to their first child when he confessed to his fathering of two children out of wedlock. These two confessions revealed that Evander had a total number of nine children fathered out of wedlock.

Joseph Price, Professor of Religious Studies at Whittier College and well-respected expert on the connection between religion and sports, says more than a simple apology is needed when sin ensnares and crushes reputations in scenarios like those of Robinson and Holyfield. He would say that Robinson and Holyfield need more than mere words to regain the public's trust. "It needs to be more than just, 'I'm sorry,' like the 4-year-old who gets the first punch against his sibling," Price said. "It needs instead to be a genuine attempt to turn around, repent, turn from, and make an effort to reclaim direction."³⁰

Again, the attempt here is not to condemn these aspiring servants of Christ, lest all be condemned due to the degree that all are given to sin. The challenge is merely to assert that Christian character needs to be foundationally developed in those who publicly proclaim Christ as a prerequisite to their public ministry, so that the word of God is not reviled, and evil is not spoken against Christianity.³¹

³⁰ Dufresne, "When Athletes Don't Practice."

³¹ Titus 2:4-8.

Finally, the beloved ESPN analyst and NFL Hall of Fame Wide Receiver Chris Carter gave the world great cause for discomfort with Christians. As a Christian, Carter claims to use the platform he has been blessed with to glorify the name of God.³² However, speaking at a 2014 NFL Rookie Symposium, Carter publicly affirmed the practice of very specific sin and illegal drug use. Instead of explaining God's heart for his children to live a life apart from sin, to walk in the truth of Christ, or to confess sinful illegal activity, Carter tutored the young men in how to hide and lie about their sin by forcing a close friend (or fall guy) to take the legal consequences for their own criminal or drug behaviors. While one might have imagined a perfect segue to talk about the Gospel (Christ taking the on the payment for our sin), it was missed entirely.

Carter literally and directly mocked his own faith in Christ and the Bible by stating that he knew they would go to "Bible study," but that the true answer to dealing with sin is to bribe someone else to go to jail for you when you commit a crime, so you can keep making money. The hope offered to the "fall guy," as Carter explained, was that they would always be bailed out of jail by the same NFL cash flow that keeps them happy daily as a friend of an NFL player.³³

The upside is that Carter did show some humility and publicly apologized for his erred comments. The reason this example matters is that Carter believed that this overt and celebrated lack of integrity was worthy of public affirmation and was an ideal

³² "Chris Carter," Christian Speakers 360, <http://www.christianspeakers360.com/speaker/cris-carter.php> (accessed August 28, 2017).

³³ "ESPN, NFL Admonish Chris Carter for Urging NFL Rookies to Have a 'Fall Guy,'" August 24, 2015, http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/13497480/espn-nfl-admonish-cris-carter-urging-nfl-rookies-fall-guy (accessed August 28, 2017).

means of teaching young men how to live criminally sinful lives. Needless to say, this was a moment lacking integrity for Carter. Chris Carter is listed as a Christian speaker who desires to use his platform to glorify the name of God. The stated fee range for his service is between \$20,000-\$30,000 to speak to matters of addictions, athletes, inspiration, sports and his faith to glorify God.³⁴

Are people given to sin? Are people embarrassed about the sin they committed before becoming Christians, or even at varying stages of the less mature days in Christianity? The answer is a resounding, “Yes.” Should everyone who can gather a crowd be a Christian speaker? Can anyone who can influence others for Christ attempt to do so as a teacher of the masses? The answer is “Absolutely not.” While we can shout from the rooftops that he who is found guiltless or without sin (none of us) should throw the first stone, we must also hold to the basic biblical guide for who is best suited to speak to or lead others. It is those whose ways match their words as they grow in Christ that should serve in these ways.

It is a wonderful display of God’s grace and transformative power when those who have lived deeply entangled in sin become Christians, or as Christians, determine to grow in Christ. This can be a beautiful turnaround story that brings a sense of genuine appreciation for God’s grace and His incredible love for people. So, it is prudent to train athletes and coaches to be patient in order to ensure that their lives truly belong to Christ as they learn to daily walk in fellowship with Christ and to earn a good Christian

³⁴ “Chris Carter,” Christian Speakers 360, <http://www.christianspeakers360.com/speaker/cris-carter.php> (accessed August 28, 2017).

reputation among outsiders (in public and private) before they take the stage to formally speak for Jesus.³⁵

This is not to say that other Christians don't all "stumble in many ways," but everyone who teaches others from a leadership platform are held to a stricter standard. That standard led the Apostle James to warn us in James 3:1 that, "Not many should become teachers."

Proven positive examples highlight the need for Christ-centered character to shine through the voice of Christian sports figures who speak of the Good News. No one can deny the power of A.C. Green's testimony as a former NBA all-star, and 3-time champion. He is a noted NBA iron man for playing a record nearly 1,200 consecutive NBA games over his 15-plus year career, without having to sit out for injury. Perhaps, most recorded is AC's commitment to abstinence before marriage. He became a Christian while still in high school, a school in which he is said to have never missed a class. While his initials A.C. don't actually mean more than stated as his given name after his father A.C. Sr., they became to stand for his reputation as one driven to be "Abstinence Committed" until married. He made true on his promise of not "pretending" to marry physically or emotionally to random women throughout his life. He was married in 2002 to his current wife, one year after his retirement from the NBA. A.C. Green is an incredible Godly man of integrity who preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ in both word and deed.³⁶

³⁵ 1 John 1:5-10; 1 Timothy 3:6-7.

³⁶ "A.C. Green Preaches What He Practices," February 20, 2008, <https://jcsuperstars.wordpress.com/2008/02/20/ac-green-preaches-what-he-practices/> (accessed August 28, 2017).

Reggie White is another godly example on the field and in his marriage. Leading by example in the rough-and-tumble world of professional football, none of his opponents or teammates could ever recall hearing him curse or seeing him fight.³⁷ That kind of stand-up character speaks volumes to the way that Christ transforms the heart of a man to be a trustworthy Christian role model for others to follow.

Perhaps, capturing a simple foundation of what is expected of Christian leader's character would be to at least say that they embrace the FCA's **S.I.T.E.** These values are biblically-engrained **S**ervanthood, **I**ntegrity, **T**eamwork, and **E**xcellence in who they are and how they live for Christ.³⁸ More than merely volunteerism, honesty, working together, and working honorably is the heart gripping pursuit of such virtues through sports figures' lives because of Christ's everlasting love.

Servanthood

Servants are those who follow the example of Christ by putting the needs of others before their own interests. These Christ-aligned servants see themselves not as the end of service, but rather an instrument of service because of what Christ has done for them. J Oswald Sanders says it this way in his writing on spiritual leadership:

Jesus teaching on servanthood and suffering was not intended merely to inspire good behavior. Jesus wanted to impart the spirit of servanthood, the sense of personal commitment and identity that He expresses when He said, "I am among you as he who serves". (Luke 22:27). Mere acts of service could be performed

³⁷ "How They Became Wealthy...It Started by Sharing," <http://www.angelfire.com/ok5/about-oklahoma/Billionaire.html> (accessed August 28, 2017).

³⁸ "Vision and Mission," Fellowship of Christian Athletes, <https://www.fca.org/aboutus/who-we-are/vision-mission> (accessed August 28, 2017). The S.I.T.E. values are based upon Matthew 20:28, Proverbs 11:3, 1 Corinthians 12:14-26, and Colossians 3:23-24, respectively.

with motives far from spiritual...As we become empty of self and dependent on God, the Holy Spirit will use us.³⁹

Jesus calls all who follow him to do as he has done symbolically by washing other's feet, a lowly dirty role only beheld by a truly humble servant.⁴⁰

Integrity

Being a servant almost inherently requires true integrity to maintain the servant-heartedness needed in all matters of life. Integrity is the value that decreases or eliminates the existence of deceitfully living a dishonest or double life. "Shepherds and teachers are not to be professional Christians, doing the right things only when in the public eye," as noted by Derek Prime and Alistair Begg.⁴¹ Integrity is the display of wholeness presented by a person's life in public, as much as it is displayed in private. The ultimate compass of consistency in life is integrity, or an unspoken honesty. Integrity after the example of Christ requires a person to have no true dissonance, distant, difference between who he is in public in comparison to who he is in private. Integrity is a true guide that disconnects a man from the ocean of pretentiousness or pretending to be someone he is not.⁴²

Many sports figures have struggled with a lack of integrity, which is a worst kind of dishonesty in the face of what otherwise would appear to the general public to be a trustworthy life of virtue. Many have promised to be honest, God-fearing, Jesus-loving,

³⁹ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1994), 23–24.

⁴⁰ John 13:14–15.

⁴¹ Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2004), 40–41.

⁴² Proverbs 11:3.

pure, and modest, only to have pictures, the internet, a loss of self-control, or flat out double-mindedness revoke their original testimony. Possessing integrity asserts that who I am and who I present myself to be are the same. Sports figures would do well, before approaching a pulpit of any sort, to do the arduous work to expose the sinful parts of their hearts to someone that they know and trust through a local church.⁴³ That someone should be a person who can disciple them toward being God's, and God's alone, in every way. They should ensure a commitment to confess and repent of secret sin in preparation for being a teacher of Christian truth to eager audiences. Reggie White shared that, as much as proclaiming faith "saying the right things" is important, it is no more critical than "living the right things."⁴⁴

Teamwork

Various chants highlighting "teamwork" fill the hallways of sports arenas across the world before and during noteworthy athletic contests. Yet, what exactly is teamwork, and what place does it have at the core of Godly character? From a Christ-centered perspective, teamwork invokes a belief of God's gifting being connected to and through the lives of multiple people in a way that causes a beautiful sense of interdependency for doing the work God has entrusted to His own to advance Gospel.⁴⁵

Teamwork is the selflessness that trounces on selfishness. A biblical perspective of teamwork helps a sports figure to humbly resonate with the fact that no one can, or should, attempt to serve God alone. After all, no one has all the gifting or talents to do

⁴³ 1 John 1:9-10.

⁴⁴ Krattenmaker, *Onward Christian Athletes*, 190.

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:14-25.

so. Each teammate in Christ, with his gift, is dependent on other teammates in Christ and their gifts to take the love and truth of Christ to others. Christian teamwork obligates the team to honor the parts of the team which seem less honorable.

Teamwork as a biblical value is to allow oneself to be talked down off the plank of independence. Every person is as dependent on the gifts and work of others as others are dependent on the gifts he or she humbly submits toward serving Christ in full collaboration with other servants of Christ. This kind of spiritual alliance in a local church maintains unity in Christ, and avoids chaos, because no one is treated better than anyone else given that all need what the other is given in order to serve Christ most effectively.⁴⁶

Even the Godhead demonstrates this reality. God the father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit each play specific roles in carrying out the redemptive work of our one God in three persons.⁴⁷ Servanthood, integrity, and teamwork encapsulate three crucial aspects of Christian character, and the last value necessary for sports figures to be faithful leaders is excellence.

Excellence

Excellence is not the comparative rubric that illuminates a person or their individual work, but the recognition that the servant does not work for man alone, but for God. This recognition centers the worker on pleasing God, and not merely people.

⁴⁶ David S. Dockery, ed., *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998).

⁴⁷ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997).

Excellent work is done by hard work carried out in the name of Christ and not in vain, nor for ill-gotten gain.⁴⁸

Excellence is often expressed as the demonstration of the highest level of performance in any arena. A simple look at the way the Bible defines the concept of excellence brings greater specificity (Colossians 3:23). The production of excellence, otherwise known as working hard, or doing one's best, can be categorized in at least two separate ways. First, working hard can be done for the goal of doing what is most desired ascetically in the eyes of a human authority to whom you will give an earthly account.

Second, working heartily toward excellence can be accomplished to give one's all sacrificially to please God as the one to whom you will be ultimately accountable. The Bible instructs followers of Christ to first pursue the kind of excellence that pleases God.⁴⁹ This does include doing one's best, but from God's perspective, not necessarily man's perspective.⁵⁰ This kind of hard-work, or excellence, will sometimes be counter-intuitive for what may be expected to please a human supervisor.

Excellence from a human or worldly perspective will at a minimum show up in temporary external success or outcomes regardless of attitude. The focus of this excellence is looking good, outdoing the opponent, or gaining more money regardless of what is required to achieve such a goal. For example, a coach may want an athlete to

⁴⁸ Psalm 127; Philippians 1.

⁴⁹ Colossians 3:23, Galatians 1:10

⁵⁰ Richard A. Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Resources to Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 111–118.

put in consistent extra time on the job, even if it means regular weekly work on Sundays without allowing time for worship, fatherhood, or a day off. Excellence from a man-focused view may also include waking up early and going to bed late daily. God may consider this excessive work vanity, not excellence when lived as a pattern.⁵¹

However, excellence from God's perspective will at a minimum show up in attitudes (patience, kindness, discipline) and work ethic (a focused full day of work beyond the basic requirements). One difference between Godly excellence and worldly excellence is that God expects his people to rest at least one day a week, and at one end of each day, except for uniquely defined windows of work. Sports figures who speak for Christ from God's word need to be those who work and aspire to be excellent by God's standards as a matter of Christ-centered character.

These four noteworthy areas of Christ-centered character give the speaker an opportunity to speak with conviction, believability, and trustworthiness. Any servant-hearted, integrity-ridden, teamwork-oriented, sports figure who espouses Christ-driven excellence is one worth listening to and following toward Christ. These 4 biblical values, **(S.I.T.E.)**, that undergird Christian Character have been used for decades in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and even longer of course for any Christian seeking to live a life worthy of God (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

Capable to Handle the Word of God

The honed ability to consistently handle, or study, God's word is a skill much desired by pastors, elders, and many followers of Christ. All Christians should desire and

⁵¹ Psalm 127:1-2.

grow in their capacity to know and understand the difference between biblical truth and man's wisdom. In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul calls this "handling God's word rightly." It is only in handling the word rightly that we can even understand the Cross of Christ well, and discern who we are to be in our Christian character.

Particularly responsible to know how to study and use God's word are those who serve in roles of spiritual leadership and speaking.⁵² Christian coaches and athletes may not be church elders or pastors, but when they take on the role of speaking about God or God's word, they need a foundational commitment to being competent at studying God's word for themselves. When Christian sports figures do not take this necessary step to study God's word, the consequence can be a message, theology, and influence that comes from and leads to a misguided destination not in line with the teaching of Christ.

Krattenmaker agrees when he refers to athlete's poor theology on winning and losing. This poor biblical understanding invokes thoughts and words of a present and vividly real God when a team or athlete is victorious, but an apparently abandoning unknown God in the midst of defeat.⁵³ Ed Uszynski, former field staff trainer for Athletes in Action, a Christian sports ministry, believes coaches and athletes could be trained to comment on being discouraged about losing after a loss, nonetheless expressing gratitude to God for the privilege to compete, even if they lost.⁵⁴ This keen understanding of how to refer to God, or how to explain God's interactions with our

⁵² Titus 1:9.

⁵³ Krattenmaker, *Onward Christian Athletes*, 80.

⁵⁴ Krattenmaker, *Onward Christian Athletes*, 80.

lives, comes as a result of knowing God's word well enough to be confident to express oneself consistently in these ways. God's word is replete with teachings on praising God regardless of the circumstances, but training to study and apply God's word helps a Bible student come to understand biblical teachings.⁵⁵

Uszynski goes on to say,

Most athletes, when they start to walk with Christ, they have it in their minds that when things go right and things go well, it obviously a sign that God was on his side. And when they don't, he wasn't. I am troubled by the suggestion that God's grace is not with a person whose life is falling apart, or that has removed himself from the losing locker room. God may be most present in the losing locker room.⁵⁶

Uszynski's concern targets the reality that sports figures often don't know what is true or untrue about what God's word teaches in the matters of life's successes and failures. These misunderstandings of Scripture are wrought throughout the athletic community by those who are not students of God's word, but who errantly presume their thoughts and feelings to be synonymous with God's word.

Uszynski is not the only one concerned. Lawrence Richards and Gary Bedfeldt note,

Correctly handling the word of truth is an essential issue for the Bible teacher. John H. Walton, Laurei Bailey and Craig Williford warn their readers of an authority crisis in Bible teaching...they are concerned that the bible is merely being used as a jumping off point for teaching. Much of bible teaching simply uses the bible to teach ideas that are only loosely related to the teaching of scripture. The result, they contend, is teaching marked only by human authority, teaching unable to change lives by the power of the Word.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Philippians 4:11-12; James 1.

⁵⁶ Krattenmaker, *Onward Christian Athletes*, 81.

⁵⁷ Lawrence O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1998), 62.

Reggie White, mentioned earlier, was known as the “minister of defense” because he is an ordained Christian minister and a well-documented out-spoken Christian. He was a talented and determined athlete who spent his Sundays preaching sermons in churches all over the state in which he lived. White explained in an interview with *Ebony Magazine*, “I’m trying to build up black people’s... self-confidence and self-reliance.”⁵⁸ Now, one might suggest that the message of self-reliance and self-confidence does not come from the Bible. A quick study of the Bible would make it clear that the more clearly a person believes that Jesus is real, the more inclined they should be to become completely dependent on him, and not on self. Later, White notes that he was not a true student of Scripture, but studied what others said about Scripture, because he had not been taught to study the word for himself.⁵⁹ He was so discouraged about his lack of biblical knowledge that he withdrew from preaching because he felt he was being used to simply raise money for church and to amuse people with his presence. A student who is capable to study God’s word is appropriately positioned to teach clear biblical messages.

Clear Biblical Messages

The need for Christians sports speakers who can deliver a clear biblical message is so significant that FCA (Fellowship of Christian Athletes) has produced a Christian Sports Figures Speaker’s Directory for their 1200-person staff in order to help them field the frequent local requests. While this attempt partially helps field and fill frequent

⁵⁸ “How They Became Wealthy.”

⁵⁹ Krattenmaker, *Onward Christian Athletes*, 190.

requests for Christian sports stars, it also aids in quality control. The requests come with an expectation that the speaker can provide some sort of clear impactful biblical message.

The well-known and highly successful NFL football coach, Tony Dungy, received a simple request to expound upon his race and social equality after he became the first African-American coach to win a Super Bowl. He certainly acknowledged his success as a minority coach, but he was prouder that he was one member of the first combination of two outspoken Christian head coaches to be in a Super Bowl. Tony Dungy is well respected in the work he does in speaking about Christ, but his next comment also reminds us that everyone can use at least some training.

Dungy further communicated how he motivated his team toward victory by saying that, “the Lord doesn’t always bring you directly through a storm, sometimes you gotta work for it.”⁶⁰ While biblical truth is always applicable to life, it is unclear as to what biblical connection exactly is being made to the life of sports by Dungy. The statement could be taken to mean many things unintentionally and it illustrates how sometimes the effort to use the bible to motivate people leads to unclear messages about biblical truth. Dungy, and many like him, are to be genuinely commended for their faithfulness to Christ. However, we can also support them as Christian leaders behind the scenes by better equipping them for the task at hand of communicating clear biblical messages.

⁶⁰ Krattenmaker, *Onward Christian Athletes*, 148-149.

In Rob Maaddi's, *Football Faith: 52 Stars Reflect on their Faith*, Russell Wilson states that nobody can stop you when you believe in Him (Jesus Christ).⁶¹ This is absolutely true, if it applies to not being halted in the everlasting relationship we have with Christ which culminates in the Christian's ultimate union with Christ in heaven. It is not always true with regard to matters of success and victory in this life, spiritually or professionally. Every day people struggle, fail, fall, stumble, get fired, under perform. The message of encouragement that we are unstoppable if we are Christians could easily be misleading. Rather, sports personnel need to be encouraged to recognize the need for training, and to have that need met with training so that God can get the most Glory!

In his book, *In the Trenches: The Autobiography*, former NFL player Reggie White says, "I realized that while I had been gifted to preach, I had not been adequately prepared to preach. I saw in the scriptures that the disciples walked with Jesus for three years. He taught them and equipped them..."⁶² White, confessed that he sometimes claimed to have heard things from God, but he used God as a cover up for choices he thought he should make. He later resolved that unless he reads something in Scripture itself, and knows it for certain to be true, he will no longer falsely attempt to speak for God.⁶³ White decided to take a couple years off from preaching in churches.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Rob Maaddi, *Football Faith: 52 Stars Reflect on Their Faith* (New York, NY: Barbour, 2015), 214.

⁶² Jim Denney, *Reggie White In the Trenches: The Autobiography* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1996) 194.

⁶³ Krattenmaker, *Onward Christian Athletes*, 190.

⁶⁴ Denney, *Reggie White In the Trenches*, 194.

Former NFL football player Tim Tebow is seen by many as a trusted communicator of the gospel message. Any positive impact he has made for Christ should be seen as a result of the thorough practice he says he received by sharing the message of the gospel as a teenager in the mission fields of the Philippines with his family. His training came through a lot of practice and repetition as teenager. In his book, *Through My Eyes*, Tebow speaks fondly of these training experiences where he learned to, “speak without notes, be authentic, and speak from the heart.”⁶⁵ He would share a gospel message that included leading people to pray a prayer that says, “I am a sinner and need a Savior. Thank you for dying on the cross for me. I open the door of my heart and ask you to come in. Save me now, Jesus. Thank you for saving me. Thank you for coming into my heart. Thank you that God is my Father and I am His child. Thank you that I have a home in heaven, and I will come and live with you some day. In Jesus’s name, Amen.”⁶⁶

This is a good gospel message in many regards and it includes several notable references to the bible. Now that Tebow is older, his gospel message could be even more biblically clear based on Greg Gilbert’s thorough biblical explanation of the gospel message God, Man, Christ, Response.

Krattenmaker says that, “Evangelicals in sports...tend to project their faith with a vigor, confidence, and conviction that befit the straight-ahead personalities of successful

⁶⁵ Tim Tebow and Nathan Whitaker, *Through My Eyes: A Quarterbacks Journey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 61.

⁶⁶ Tebow and Whitaker, *Through My Eyes*, 61.

athletes.”⁶⁷ It would be incredible to add thorough preparation to these inspiring servants for Christ so that they could be used even more mightily by God.

Twice each year, FCA conducts “dry-run” or “drill” training to teach their staff to speak. This area of training primarily focuses on the ability to be clear, effective, and confident. Alex Hoffler, Public Speaking Coach with Mills Wyck Communications, comes into conduct the training for the FCA National Staff Training meetings. I listened to Hoffler present in Kansas City, MO, on September 26th, 2011 when he said that the most crucial factors in communicating a clear biblical message falls in line with the following three tips for being a better communicator:

1. Facilius (Simpler)
2. Brevius (Shorter)
3. Tardius (Slower)

These tips focus on primarily one area of Hoffler’s training. They focus on supporting the primary point or message of the speaker, so that it is clear. This idea of FCA training their staff along these lines is critically necessary. The training is a direct response to the known reality that these, mostly former sports figures will be required to speak regularly because of the combination of their connection to sports experience and their faith in Christ.

Hoffler’s idea of clarity is well-supported historically by Haddon Robinson.

Robinson believes that clarity is paramount, “A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pews.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Krattenmaker, *Onward Christian Athletes*, 104.

⁶⁸ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014), 141.

In other words, if the speaker is the slightest bit unclear, the audience is absolutely lost in what the speaker is trying to say. Robinson teaches the concept of a message being focused on a single passage of Scripture and a single “Big Idea” based on that text.⁶⁹

Perhaps, his emphatic point about clarity is superlatively helpful:

We do not understand a passage from the bible or a point of theology unless we can express it clearly to the men and women sitting before us. Make no mistake about it. For preachers, clarity is a moral matter. It is not merely a question of rhetoric, but a matter of life and death. Imagine a physician who prescribes a drug but fails to give clear instruction as to how and when the drug is to be used. The physician puts the patient’s life at risk. It is a moral matter for a doctor to be clear. So, too, when we proclaim God’s truth., we must be clear. If we believe that what we preach either draws people to God or keeps them away from Him, then for God’s sake and for the people’s sake, we must be clear.⁷⁰

Every message composed of main ideas, introductions, outlines with main points, transitions, a conclusion, and non-spoken communication all have the same one goal of using all aspects of communication to get across a clear point.

Conclusion

We would not in good conscience affirm a newer driver to teach driver’s education, nor allow entry level employees to train others to use heavy machinery. Neither is it wise to unleash untrained speakers on unsuspecting audiences to explain how to confess or live for Jesus. It is not necessarily ideal to have sports figures attend seminary, spend years in training, nor bear the expense of earning another degree. However, a mixture of faithfulness and humility combined with an opportunity for training from a local pastor or other experienced Bible teacher would contribute to God

⁶⁹ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 35.

⁷⁰ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 188.

using their enormous platform in our sports-crazed culture to proclaim the gospel truth of God's word. This could take place through athletes using Twitter feeds, post-game interviews, testimonies, church events, sermons, and special events to speak of the gracious truthful loving message of Jesus Christ to all who God would draw near. The simple but necessary training would be worth it for every ounce of faithfulness that we would offer God and for every measure of grace he would add to the work he gives us to celebrate his Glory for the fame us his name.

CHAPTER 4 PROJECT DESIGN

Introduction

This chapter includes a detailed outline of a training curriculum designed to prepare Christian sports figures - current and past coaches or athletes - to be biblically responsible speakers. Prior to providing the outlines of workshop sessions, the chapter discusses the project design and the rationale for the design, the project assessment, and the implementation of the project. The four sessions of training included below are Session 1-Cross (The Gospel), Session 2-Character (Christian Behavior), Session 3-Capable (How to Study the Bible), and Session 4-Clarity (Clear Biblical Messages).

Project Design

The project was created for biblically untrained sports figures of a broad range of culture and ages to be trained by non-seminary level instructors. The instructors are expected to be qualified by the responsibilities afforded to anyone in the role of ministry staff or participant oversight. The training is designed to take place in a classroom setting over the course of 4.5 hours in one day or spread out over several different meetings that use 1.5 hours for each of the 4 training sessions. The sessions are created to be stand-alone sessions for those who do not require all four sessions or specialization in one area. In addition, the sessions are created as stand-alone to allow for ongoing training offerings at varying times in varying locations.

Project Rationale

The Project provides a means to better prepare sports figures to communicate God's Word effectively. The training is created so multiple teachers can access the training to prepare to train in one-on-one or group settings, whenever the need arises. The biblical areas of training are taught in a way as to be accessible to those in the laity who train other Christians who are also not trained in how to speak. In addition, the content of the training is designed to be easily transferable to be re-trained with a secondary audience.

Project Implementation

Selected portions of the project were taught 6 times in total:

February 2015, Elk Grove Village, IL Coaches

Sessions 1-3 (Cross, Character, Capable) were taught from 4pm-8pm. Of 10 coaches and former athletes invited, 5 attended. They represented Evanston High School, Wheaton College, Trinity International University, and Concordia).

April 2015 Deerfield, IL. Trinity International University-Football Coaching Staff

Session 3 (Capable to Handle Scripture) was taught over the course of 3 hours at the request of the Head Football coach due to the sessions he participated in from the previous February in Elk Grove Village.

August-September 2015 Elgin, IL Judson University FCA Participant

Athlete Leadership Team

Session 1(Cross) was taught over the course of 4 different dates spanning 4 weeks of 30-minute sessions. The participants then team-taught session 1 (Cross) over the next month to their teammates in a voluntary meeting.

September 2016 to April 2017 Judson University Athletic Department Coaching Staff

Sessions 1-3 (Cross, Character, Capable) were taught over the course of an academic year in ten 20-minute meetings. The athletic director wanted to better equip their coaches, and he asked me to conduct the training at their staff meetings.

March 2017 Former Athlete and Intern

Session 4 (Clear Biblical Messages) in 3 1-hour sessions with one individual intern.

August 2017: Faith Lutheran Coaching Staff 2017

Sessions 1-3 (Cross, Character, Capable) were taught at the request of the athletic director to better train his coaches to influence their teams.

Preparing Christian Sports Figures to Speak (One Day, 4.5 Hours)

Session 1

Cross: The Gospel of Christ (65 minutes)

Teaching Objectives: To demonstrate the need to have clarity in understanding of the Gospel, assess the participant's understanding of the gospel¹, explain the gospel, and have the participants walk away with a clear repeatable understanding of the Gospel.

Leader Preparation: Pray, confirm location/time/date/headcount, walk through A/V connections for PowerPoint, dry-erase board and markers, Gospel Cards-laminated for each participant, confirm seating arrangement (U shape, board room, or class room if larger group), mints, water bottles, snacks, pre-fold card stock name cards & permanent markers, index cards, bibles, numbered assessment forms placed under seats in advance face down, provide 2 prizes for blindfold ice-breaker winning team. Be sure to ask the host and/or participants for a sense of where the participants are spiritually (not yet Christians, newer Christians, Spiritually Mature, Mature pastor/elder leaders). Ensure that participants have Bibles or you can use PowerPoint to display the bible verses you will use for this session.

Welcome (2 minutes): Greet attendees at the door, invite them to refreshments, fill out a name card with a sharpie, and find a seat.

Warmup (8 minutes): The purpose of this training with you is to train and prepare you to speak. Personal speaker Introduction 1 minute. Have each participant share where they are from and what they do for work. After they finish (5minutes, if it is a large group they should be sharing in groups of 3-4), let them know you would like to take some valuable time to pray for the group before getting started (use the Lord's prayer as the guide-2 minutes).²

Ice Breaker with Thematic Purpose (10 minutes): Break up into teams of 2, blindfolds (or eyes closed), assemble to one location in the room (i.e., entrance), put blindfold on one person of each team. Have each team stand outside the entrance to the room. Give them all, as a group, 60 seconds to have their coach (person not blinded folded) lead the blindfolded person to the "Southwest Corner of the room" for first place and a prize. Count to 3 and say go. Award prize to first place team. Have everyone return to their seats.

Ice Breaker Transition: If you were the coach you had the responsibility to take your person to the destination. Did you know where the destination was? Did you know where to guide them? Did you know how to guide them? (arm, shoulder, hand, back).

¹ William R.C. Yount, *Created to Learn* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1996), 284.

² See Appendix 1- Lord's Prayer Example Matthew 6:9-13.

The blindfolded person had to trust. Did you trust? Did you listen? Were you confused? As Christian coaches you have the responsibility to guide your players toward Christ. Do you know where to take them? Do you know how to take them? Or do you just go? Now from your players perspectives: Do they trust you? Do they listen? Are they confused?

Our purpose in this effort of Training to prepare you to teach through four areas of preparation: Cross-the Gospel Message, Character-Christian Character, Capable to Handle Gods word, Clearly prepare bible messages. Cross-To know specifically what it means to be a Christian well enough to simply and biblically explain it to others, character-having Godly lifestyle that is obvious to those around your life and beyond, capable to study the bible in a way that you can teach others to study the bible, clear bible messages that help others better understand God.

Assessment (10 minutes): Before we get started, I want to do a kind of assessment³ of where you are at based on those 4 standards of preparation. (the forms are numbered so please do not put your name on them) CAUTION: do not overrate yourself. No one will be able to find out your answers as your name is not on the forms. I will not give the forms to others to see your handwriting. Please take your time and please be honest. This is not like a resume that projects where you hope to be but more like an annual review. This simple assessment is more of post-game film room where the game film is played back, and truth is revealed about the past so the players and coaches can get better. Honest results will help me get better as a trainer because we will also assess you at the end of the training to get your feedback.

Workout (30 minutes): The Gospel Should be Central to your message and life. Let's walk through the following text (read the text 1 minute of 25 minutes): 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 (ESV) "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

³ See Appendix 2: Pre-Training Assessment.

Teaching Outline for 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 (5 of 30 minutes)

- A. Paul emphasizes the message of the Cross.⁴
 - 1. Paul plainly proclaimed God's story of Good News. v.1
 - a. A testimony is the story of the good Gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ.⁵
 - b. Paul explained the salvation message plainly without using lofty speech or great wisdom.⁶
 - 2. Paul professed to know Jesus Christ and put aside everything else. v.2
 - a. Paul knew about Christ and focused his words on Christ's life.
 - b. Paul focused on Christ's substitutionary crucifixion.
 - c. Paul decided not to focus on his own knowledge gained from being trained as Jewish leader.⁷
 - 3. Paul Message focused on Gods Power v.3-5
 - a. Paul put aside weakness and fear. v.3 (2 Cor. 10:10,11:21, 12:7-9)
 - b. Paul's message lacked big wise words. v.4
 - c. Paul's demonstrated the power of God through His Spirit. v.4
 - d. Paul's hoped people would rest in the power of God not that of men v. 5
- B. Since the Gospel ("Jesus Christ crucified") is so Important, we must know the answer to the question: What is the Gospel? (15 of 30 minutes)
 - 1. There is an index card at your seat, please take one. Please put your favorite number & show size on the back so you remember which one is yours. I am going to ask you to write on the other side of that card the answer to the following question. What you would say to someone who comes to you and says, "I know that you are a Christian. Can you explain the gospel to me right now and help me become a Christian too?" Since we are Christians and our faith is so important to us, this should be something we can do. Now here in class to practice, you have 1 minute to write down on one side of that index card what this person needs to know for salvation in Christ. Use verses or verse references if you can (bibles closed/phones off). Ready, Set, Go. After 1 minute has passed, please hand in each index card to the center and everyone take one that is not yours. Please take turns and quickly read out what is on the index card you picked out. (use dry erase board to write 4 main categories of the Gospel God, Man, Christ, Response and write the participants representative word, phrase, or comment under the category (God, Man, Christ, Response) each time a word or

⁴ See detailed exegesis in Chapter 2.

⁵ R.J. Utley, *Paul's Letters to a Troubled Church: I and II Corinthians* (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2002), 32.

⁶ W.H. Mare, "1 Corinthians," *Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 198.

⁷ R. Jamieson, A.R. Fausset and D. Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 265.

category is referenced from an index card that is read out loud by the participants. Each reading should only take 30 seconds. Give a simple comment of encouragement after each card is read. Note: There is only time for reading about 5-7 cards or the equivalent of about 5 minutes. Given what our Gospel sharing index cards say, have we given a clear, biblical explanation of the Gospel? Remember to Give a comment of encouragement to the group for their effort and highlight the importance of being clear about the gospel when we speak, instead of leaving the Gospel message unclear to people we share with. We are here in this session to get better at communicating the Gospel. So far if we use the comments we have, we would not be as clear as we could be about the Cross of Christ. Return the cards to their rightful owners. Leader says, “now please repeat after me for a clear statement of the Gospel. The Gospel is God, Man, Christ, Response”. Please have the group repeat the Gospel again. The Gospel is God, Man, Christ, Response. To be unclear about the Cross of Christ is to leave people confused about the love of Jesus.

- a. Why is Gospel clarity critical? Listen to this true story. There was a man in the hospital dying from a lifetime of alcohol use and his new pastor visited him on his deathbed. The pastor only knew him for a short while, and he asked the man if he had already put his faith in Christ. The man said, “yes. Jesus is my savior”. The pastor was relieved and said, “Great.” and proceeded to affirm the man’s faith by saying “Great, so you have already believed that Jesus never sinned, that he died in your place and that he was risen from the dead, Praise God”. The man then said, “I don’t believe that Jesus never sinned. He was a man just like the rest of us, right pastor.” The pastor then said, “Well he was a man like the rest of us, but he also never sinned based on what the bible teaches about him. The man became angry, “Really pastor, it doesn’t say that in the bible and If the bible says that and you can show it to me, then I will believe it.” The pastor visited the man in the hospital again to explain how the bible said that Jesus never sinned. The man was not allowed to have any foreign uncovered/unsterilized objects in the room, to eliminate infections, so the pastor could not take his own bible into the room. Once the pastor realized that the man had a bible of his own, the pastor showed the man the bible verses where it says that Jesus never sinned. The man saw the truth of God’s word and believed in Jesus for the first time. The man then began to wonder how he might tell his family about Jesus more clearly before he died just months later.

To further explain the point, here you had a man who had been around church, he had heard many Christian speakers, and he thought he believed in Jesus. In reality he actually rejected the truth about Jesus and he did not know it. He did not believe in Jesus as God (sinless), which is required for salvation. Someone was not likely not clear about the message of the gospel for this man, but the people who knew him assumed he was already a Christian. We have to be clear on the Gospel.

- b. Teaching Point: We have to be clear about the gospel. While this is not an equation, we want to explain the Gospel from a God-centered biblical perspective not a man-centered perspective. For instance, don't start with sin when explaining the Gospel, because that can be a man-centered approach. Start with God. One way to do this is to teach the Gospel as God, then Man, then Christ, and Response.
- c. Explain the Gospel (God, Man, Christ, Response) on the Dry erase Board (5 of 30) minutes).⁸
 - i. Remind the group that this is not an equation, or a perfect method, but a tool to use for biblical clarity and transferable truth about Christ.
 - ii. Hand out the laminated pocket Gospel Cards as memory aids.
- d. Explain the Gospel again (5 of 30 minutes, take longer than 5 minutes for groups that really struggled with the index card Gospel practice). The Gospel can be explained as "God, Man, Christ, Response", but now let's look at it in a PowerPoint and refer to the online downloadable PowerPoint or PDF. The slides are up online at www.fcleadership.org under "training". You can download and use them as you would like.⁹

Wrap-up (1 minute): You now have a tested and repeatable tool to use to teach the gospel biblically in your messages. Pray to close Session 1. Take a 5-minute break.

⁸ Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); See Appendix 3: Gospel Illustration.

⁹ See Appendix 3: Gospel Illustration.

Session 2
Character: Christian Character (65 minutes)

Teaching Objectives: To demonstrate the need to have Christian character as a Christian speaker, show our potential lack of Christian Character in at least 4 areas¹⁰, explain the pathway to developing Christian Character, and to have the participants walk away with a pursuit of growing in 4 specific areas of focused Christian Character.

Leader Preparation: Provide 2 prizes for blindfold ice-breaker winning team. Prepare for the space needed in the ice-breaker game. Prepare for a mini 5-minute service project that the group can do for the host site (take out their trash, vacuum, clean bathrooms, leave a note of encouragement with a verse, or a prayer on a note). Ask someone in the class in advance if they would be willing to pray to close session 2. This session will take just over 1 hour, so prepare to be focused. Ensure that participants have bibles or you can use PowerPoint to display the bible verses you will use for this session.

Welcome (2 minutes): Opening comments: There seems to be a new expectation put on coaches and at times athletes. If you are a coach or an athlete or have been, you have always been expected to win. You have always been expected to fulfill expectations regarding playing time, regarding next level potential. You are expected to teach others discipline and hard work (something that arguably should be taught at home). You are often expected to make others better performers. Perhaps the newest most normative, at times unspoken expectation is to “make others better people”. You hear it at tributes given to coaches or bosses, you hear about it in interviews. It also comes out in recruiting invitations, purpose statements, or comments made by coaches after allegations and discipline are applied to athletes under their watch. It is however not in the training manual. Little extra time seems to be allowed for making others better people and it seems to rarely be offered at sports training clinic.

Warm-up (8 minutes): The Icebreaker. An open room or larger hallway with no obstacles is needed. It is helpful to have at least 6 total participants. Blindfold teammates (one person is blindfolded, and one person is the “coach”). Blindfolded in one corner of the room. After blind folds are on. Have “coaches” go to the opposite corner of the room. Then go and quietly place a treasure item in an accessible location in the center of room. The goal is for the coaches to talk out loud all at the same time to guide their blind-folded teammate to the treasure item as quickly as possible to win. The blind-folded participants can walk, but not run.

It is time to explain the point. There is so much noise, it is hard to tell which voice to follow, especially if you can’t see where you are going. Many of us know we are supposed to be more like a Christian in our behavior, but we don’t know what that looks like or who to listen to or how to get there. We will give you a biblical picture of what

¹⁰ William R.C. Yount, *Created to Learn* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1996), 284.

Christian Character looks like and the “S.I.T.E” again the “S.I.T.E.” to help you get there, with a few clear action points to get you on your way.

Workout (55 Minutes): Godly Character is essential to you as a communicator of truth. Let’s read through the following texts. James 3:1 (ESV) “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”

Below are the biblical standards by which we are to be judged as a Christian speaker who leads or oversees others with your words. (use 2 of 50 minutes of reading the text below)

1 Timothy 3:1–7 (ESV) “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”

Teaching Outline for 1 Timothy 3:1-7 (8 of 55 minutes)¹¹

- A. The honorable role of leading others as a teacher has requirements.v.1
 - 1. A leader must desire the task of leadership.v.1
 - 2. A leader must be blameless in life to avoid unnecessary criticism and scandals. v.2-3¹²
 - a. Leaders must be faultless in marriage, if married.
 - i. The leader must live as though married to only one woman.
 - b. Leaders must be faultless in being emotionally behavior.¹³
 - c. Leaders must be faultless in self-controlled behavior.
 - d. Leaders must be faultless in behavior and presentation.
 - e. Leaders must be faultless in the sharing of his home life.
 - f. Leaders must be able to explain the bible.
 - g. Leaders must not be influenced by alcohol.
 - h. Leaders must not be aggressive.
 - i. Leaders must be gentle.
 - j. Leaders must not be argumentative.
 - k. Leaders must be content regarding money.
 - 3. A leader must manage his household well. v.4-5
 - a. If a leader cannot manage his home well, how can he lead others?
 - 4. A leader must be an experienced believer. v.6-7
 - a. An experienced believer will be less likely to be prideful with a position of leadership, as compared to a new believer.
 - b. An experienced believer will have had time to establish respect from others in his new life in Christ, as compared to a new believer.
- B. To summarize these many aspects of Christian Character we can use, as promised, our S.I.T.E. The S.I.T.E. values have been used for decades to give leaders in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (fcaleadership.org)¹⁴ as a way to focus efforts toward building Christian character into leaders, who often go on to speak regularly. S.I.T.E. is based upon the following verses: John 13:14-15 (Servanthood for the “S”), Proverbs 11:3 (Integrity for the “I”), 1 Peter 4:10 (Teamwork for the “T”), and Colossians 3:23-24, respectively (Excellence for the “E”).
 - 1. Servanthood (15 of 55 minutes): John 13:14-15 (Read the verse)
 - a. Servanthood is a lifestyle of living for Christ not a role or event to sign up for.

¹¹ See detailed Exegesis in Chapter 2.

¹² Earle, “1 Timothy,” 364.

¹³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (1996), 751; William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (2000), 672.

¹⁴ “What Is FCA,” Fellowship of Christian Athletes, <http://www.fca.org/what-is-fca> (accessed August 28, 2017).

- b. Example: Because we are servants let's take 10 minutes, just 10 minutes and serve this host site (trash out, sweep, salt/snow, clean bathrooms, leave a note of encouragement with a verse, or a prayer on a note, email a series of encouragements to someone as a group, leave an envelope of cash with a note)
 - c. We are to be servants at home, work, during leisure, and while serving.
 - d. Where might you lacking in choosing to be a servant with your time, attitude, resources?
- 2. Integrity (10 of 55 minutes): Proverbs 11:3 (Read the verse)
 - a. Integrity is a matter of living a consistent life in private and in public, at home and at work, on your phone/computer and when others are with you, and at church or at a game.
 - b. In what ways are you living inconsistently (language, attitude, spending, purity w/media, purity in relationships, night life, social life, drinking, work)? Confidentially write down the area(s) of inconsistency in your life on the back of your gospel card so you can work on it later with those who disciple you.
- 3. Teamwork (10 of 55 minutes): 1 Corinthians 12:14-26 (Read the verse)
 - a. What are you good at doing as a Christian to serve others?
 - b. What are you not so good at which means you need to depend on the gifts of others and support them in (this is not an opportunity for laziness but humility)?
 - c. Who has gifts or contributions that are not appreciated serving but could be encouraged and appreciated by you?
 - d. When and how will you choose to thank them for their contributions?
- 4. Excellence (10 of 55 minutes)- Colossians 3:23 (Read the verse)
 - a. We are supposed to work with a focus on doing work for God and not with a focus on doing work for people.
 - b. How have you not worked hard enough and what will you do to worker harder at your job or volunteering?
 - c. How have you overworked and tried to over please your boss (Galatians 1:10, Psalm 127:1-2)

Wrap up (10 minutes):

- A. You are not going to grow by accident. Someone is going to have to water the seed, tend the soil, prune the vines, bring in the harvest, and repeat. God says that "someone" is ideally supposed to come from your local church (Heb. 10:24-25). If you don't have a local church with leaders in it that can disciple you please get that settled before you leave today (Matt. 28:19-20, Col.1:28-29, Eph. 4:11-16).
- B. We cannot Grow without God, but God will not grow you without your participation. What do you need to do to takes steps of growth?

1. What old sinful ways do you need to put off (Col. 3:5-9)?
2. What new Godly ways do you need to put on (Col. 3:12-17)?
3. Find and choose a healthy church to be a part of.
4. Find someone inside my church who can disciple me.
5. Take advantage of the opportunity already offered by my church.
6. Reach out to a trusted, trained, tested person who can help disciple you as you take the biblical advice they give you. (pastor, elder, biblical counselor)

*Instructor: Have the person you asked in advance pray to close Session 2.

Session 3
Capable: Capable to Better Handle the Bible (65 minutes)

Teaching Objective: To demonstrate the need to be able to study God's word as a Christian speaker, help participants identify their own competence level in bible study¹⁵, explain a God centered bible study method, have the participants walk away with a clear transferable way to study the bible.

Leader Preparation: Practice the delivery of the ice breaker questions in advance. Make sure that the participants each have pens, paper and a hand-held bible. It might be ideal that the bibles all have the same page numbers that you can state out loud, so as to avoid embarrassment of someone not knowing where to turn. Ensure that participants have Bibles, or you can use PowerPoint to display the bible verses you will use for this session.

Welcome (2 minutes): Sometimes people just don't know what they are doing. Everyone has seen a new person at their job and watched them get confused or rushed or scared of making a mistake. Sometimes, if we are honest, that clueless person is us when it comes to being capable to handle the bible, but we are going to change that today.

Warmup (3 minutes): This Icebreaker is entitled "Would you Ever." Would you ever YouTube how to do a heart surgery, before performing it as a non-Physician? Would you use a quick start guide manual to learn how to operate a 747 Airplane w/passengers on board? Would you ever ask "SIRI" how to create an atomic bomb to ensure the safety of your country? Likely the reason you would not or at least should not, is because those activities have such a serious impact on people's lives. Well, being the speaker who is asked to influence others with your words also has a major impact on people's lives. If we are going to speak publicly as Christians, we need to seek to be more capable of handling the bible from which our message originates. A lot of Christians just fake it and live in the shame of cluelessness for how to study their bibles. But if you are a leader, a Christian speaker, there is a higher standard and that is why we are here. Please pray with me as we begin the workout.

Workout (60 minutes): Knowing how to handle and study the bible is essential to you as a communicator of truth. Let's read through the following text:

2 Timothy 2:14–19 (ESV) "Remind them of these things and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will

¹⁵ Yount, *Created to Learn*, 284.

spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

Teaching Outline for 2 Timothy 2:14–19 (5 of 60 minutes)¹⁶

- A. A worker (teacher) is to be approved by God.
 - 1. A worker approved by God reminds others before God not to quarrel about words. v.14
 - a. Quarreling about words has a negative impact on the listener.
 - 2. A worker approved by God handles the word accurately. v.15
 - a. An approved worker has no need to be embarrassed, due to handling the word rightly.
 - b. Unapproved workers are embarrassed because of not knowing how to study the bible.
 - 3. A worker approved by God avoids disrespectful talk about God's truth. v.16-18
 - a. Disrespectful talk about God's truth leads people into more ungodliness.
 - b. Disrespectful talk spreads like a disease.
 - i. Disrespectful talkers can wander from the truth of God's word about the topic of resurrection.
 - ii. Disrespectful talkers can upset some people's faith.
 - 4. A worker approved by God is known by God. v.19
 - a. God approved workers name God as their own.
 - b. God approved workers walk away from sin.
- B. Please use this Bible Study Method (1 of 60 minutes). It is important to develop a consistent way to study the bible so that you as an approved worker of God are consistently arriving at the biblical idea that God used the author to specifically communicate and apply to our lives. Having a simple consistent method will also help you pass on your ability to study the bible to others. Unite the class into smaller groups of 3-4 people and have each group choose a passage they want to practice studying based on a section of the bible one person in their group has spoken on in the past or based on a section they plan to speak on in the future.
 - 1. Select the Passage that you will use to teach (10 minutes).
 - a. Select a chapter from OT story, or one paragraph, or one section as noted by the subtitles in your bible. This would be approximately 4 and up to approximately 25 verses. Choose a smaller passage for practice. When a story is being told in the bible it will often be longer sections with more verses.

¹⁶ See detailed exegesis in Chapter 2.

- b. Read the section you have selected out loud in the group three times. Now quietly individually include the reading of a full chapter before the selected section and a full chapter after the selected section.
2. This is a God-centered bible study technique (15 Minutes).
 - a. From within the selected passage, write down what the author says specifically about God, Jesus Christ, Lord, Holy Spirit.
 - b. From within the selected passage, write down what action or role God, Jesus Christ, Lord, or Holy Spirit are taking in the passage.
 - c. Have a spokesperson for 2 groups share their work with the larger class and help the group strengthen and clarify their work.
3. Summarize the main idea of the selected section (15 minutes).
 - a. What is the author talking about thematically or topically?¹⁷
 - i. For example: Are there main words or verbs repeated or emphasized with a purpose statement or “how to” statement?
 - ii. For example: What main idea or sentence do all of the other sentences seem to support?
 - iii. For example: Matthew 6: 5-13 The author is talking about “prayer” as the main theme or topic.
 - b. What is the author saying about what he is talking about?¹⁸
 - i. Now that you have identified the main theme or topic of the passage, what do the supporting words, sentences, or “if” “then” clauses say about the main theme or topic the author is talking about.
 - ii. For example: Matthew 6:5-13 The author is explaining the way not to pray like hypocrites (v.5) and non-Christians (gentiles v.7) and then he explains the right way to pray.
 - c. Have a spokesperson for 2 groups share their work with the larger class and help the group strengthen and clarify their work.
4. Try to outline the selected section of scripture you have chosen by making two, three, or four main section headings and placing each verse from your section all under those main headings based on the main theme or topic or main verbs. (10 of 60 minutes)
 - a. For an example of a “two main headings” outline, please see Matthew 6:5-13, “There are wrong ways to pray and right ways to pray.”

¹⁷ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014), 41.

¹⁸ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 41.

- I. There are wrong ways to pray. v.5,7-8
 - A. Hypocritically standing up at synagogue, praying in the public, and hoping to be seen by others is bad. v.5
 - B. People who pray just to be heard by others will receive their reward from others, but not by God. v.5-6
 - C. It is not good too use a lot of big words or long phrases, because God already knows what we need. v.7-8

II. Pray the right way. v.6,9-13

- A. Praying in secret is a good way to pray. v.6
- B. God rewards those who pray in secret. v.6
- C. Praying the right way will include at least 6 components.
 - 1. Pray to God's name directly and worship His name. v.9
 - 2. Ask for God's kingdom and will to come to earth. v.10
 - 3. Ask God for daily bread. v. 11
 - 4. Ask God and others for forgiveness. v.12
 - 5. Give forgiveness to others.v.12
 - 6. Ask God to lead you and others away from temptation and evil.v.13
- b. For an outline example with four main headings, please see 2 Timothy 2:14–19 as already outlined for you above. (5 of 60 minutes)
- c. Have a spokesperson for 2 groups share their work with the larger class and help the group strengthen and clarify their work.

Wrap-Up (30 seconds): You, in a short amount of time, have already learned three very helpful bible study tips that make you more capable to handle the bible.

- 1. What is the author saying about God?
- 2. What is the author talking about?
- 3. What is the author saying about what he is talking about?

Session 4
Clarity: Clear Biblical Messages (60 minutes)

Teaching Objective: To demonstrate the need to create a clear biblical message as a Christian speaker, show the participant's potential lack of ability to create a clear biblical message,¹⁹ explain a message creating method, and have the participants walk away with a clear repeatable way to put together a simple clear biblical message.

Leader Preparation: Prepare to pray in line with the biblical example of prayer given the last sessions example from Matthew 6:5-13. Be sure to practice the Icebreaker sentences audibly with the proper emphasis and pause prior to the session beginning so as to avoid any lack of clarity when you lead the session. Also, practice explaining the point of each statement with one or two lines. Ensure that participants have Bibles, or you can use PowerPoint to display the bible verses you will use for this session.

Welcome (2 Minutes): A 60MPH wind pushes your car in gusts to go off the road, slanting aggressive rain pellets beat down on your car. All of a sudden you see cars in front of you slamming on their breaks. The cars in front of them can no longer see the cars in front of them clearly, so they stop driving. (Pause) Your audience also stops following you when they can't see clearly in front of them where you are going to take them biblically. Your messages have to be clearly right from Gods word, so that people can follow where you are going.

Warmup (8 Minutes): Ice Breaker: The meaning of the following 8 statements can have very different meanings depending on word definition, meaning, emphasis, or context so please listen closely.

1. He turned to her and said, "when would you like me to make a proposal?"
(If a man turns to his female boss and says this in a more social setting or in a more jovial way it could be taken the wrong way to refer to a marriage proposal instead of a business proposal for their joint ventures)
2. Why don't you talk? OR Why don't you talk less?
(The addition of one word obviously completely changes the meaning)
3. "HOW did you DO this?" vs. "How did YOU do THIS?"
(The first expression shares positive joyful amazement of the accomplishment of a great and challenging task. The second expression shares confusion perhaps with a frown about someone who is not respected doing a task poorly or doing a task that is too hard for someone who is not as seen as smart)
4. Let's eat, Grandma. OR Let's eat Grandma.

¹⁹ Yount, *Created to Learn*, 284.

(The first expression invites grandma to lunch. The second expression invites others to eat the grandma as a form of cannibalism)

5. I cannot recommend this person too highly
(This could be taken to suggest that a person is very respected and highly recommended, or this can be taken to explain a person's hesitancy to highly recommend someone)
6. He cut us up in the car.
(This could be taken to mean that someone told hilarious jokes while in the car with others or This could mean that someone attempted assault while in a car)
7. She is the mean participant in the class.
(This could explain that a participant is harsh and rude to other participants or that her grade is the average representative of achievement in the class)
8. Hot dogs are fun to take to the pool during summer.
(This could mean that someone enjoys a certain kind of food at poolside or it can mean that someone enjoys taking their dog swimming in the summer)

Biblical Clarity, especially when talking about God's timeless truth in our messages is non-negotiable. Proverbs 18:21 says that the power of life and death are in the tongue. When you speak you have an opportunity to teach someone life-saving truth about God and his love. Please pray with me as we transition to the workout.

Workout (40 minutes): Can I have a volunteer to read for us?

2 Timothy 4:1–4 (ESV) “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” (1 of 40 minutes)

Teaching Outline for 2 Timothy 4:1–4

A. Preach the word (5 of 40 minutes).²⁰

1. God is the righteous witness, Preach the word entirely v.1-2
 - a. Preach the word in all seasons (for all occasions).
 - b. Preach the word patiently in all aspects of explanation.
 - i. Preach in order to correct people.
 - ii. Preach in order to challenge people.
 - iii. Preach with a passionate invitation toward change.
2. People will not always continue accepting the truth of the word v.3-4
 - a. People will gather preachers to preach to their personal agendas.
 - b. People will turn away from truth.
 - c. People will wander off into myths.

B. It would be ideal to use one of the outlines you already have before you from previous work. If you were able to create a useful outline that is consistent with the scripture, we will use that one. If you as a group were not able to create a clear outline of a section of the scripture then please use one of the ones you have written down today from session 1, Session 3, or Session 4 which you just received. If you have done well in your capability to study the bible, then putting together a clear biblical message can be a lot easier (1 of 40 minutes).

1. Now, we want to discuss 2 basic formats of a message.²¹

- a. Is your passage making a biblical statement upfront then giving the reasons for the upfront statement with the verses that follow (5 of 40 minutes)?
 - i. Example: 2 Timothy 4:1-4
Upfront statement: The Word must be preached.
Reasons for the upfront statement from the text: People need patient specific direction from the word and a time is coming when they will no longer listen to the word. (This is a deductive message format)
 - ii. In this example we already knew the answer as it was stated upfront, “The word must be preached”. It should also be noted that even after the message is preached the conclusion is still, “So then Preach the Word.”

²⁰ See detailed exegesis in Chapter 2.

²¹ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 117-123.

- b. Is your passage communicating a biblical idea that does not provide an answer or solution until the end of the passage (5 of 40 minutes)?
 - i. Example: Matt. 6:5-13
Biblical Idea: There are different ways to pray.
This biblical idea is given but we don't have answers to the question of, "what are the different ways to pray"? The answer to the stated idea is, "There are wrong ways to pray and there are right ways to pray". You cannot obtain this answer however until the full passage is explained.
 - ii. In this example we had an idea stated upfront, "There are different ways to pray", but we did not have the answer until we got to the end. We did not know the different and bad ways to pray nor did we know the right ways to pray until the last verses were explained. (This is an Inductive message format).
- C. It is also necessary to think about your audience as you prepare the Message (10 of 40 minutes).
 - 1. Learn to ask questions about your audience before you prepare your message so that you are thinking of them and questions they might have as you arrange your message. Ask their age, gender, general socio-economic status, and level of spiritual maturity. Also, make sure you know how long you are supposed to speak for.
 - 2. Does your passage help the listener in one of the following areas? ²²
 - a. Informing-Does the passage help to inform the listener to understand, think, or not think in a specific way?
 - b. Inspiring-Does the passage help inspire the heart and emotions of the listener to love, hate, desire, grieve, or rejoice?
 - c. Inviting-Does the passage help to invite the listener to do some action or not do an action with their hands, feet, or physical behavior?
 - d. Remember, the passage may include a combination of 2 or 3 different areas at the same time?
- D. It is now an appropriate time to consider the elements of the message that introduce, clarify, apply it to the listener, and conclude the message.²³ These elements help bring to the home and heart of the listener exactly what the listener should do in response to what the text is teaching. (15 of 40 minutes)

²² Richards and Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching*, 137.

²³ Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007).

1. You will want to briefly introduce the message in a way that causes the listener to understand why they need to listen to this message. It will get the listener's attention as well as help to introduce the idea and passage you will talk about. Brief stories, illustrations, picture, or statistics can help as long as they do not take more than 2-3 minutes to explain.
 2. You may realize that certain main points in the message require more clarity or a need to connect or apply the point to the listener. This can take place by using another bible passage or bible story, a personal or researched story, visual aid, or statistic to help explain it.
 - i. It is also ok to use this for a subpoint in the message if it helps to clarify.
 - ii. This point of clarity is not only for the sake of explaining what the bible may say but this point of clarity strongly aids the listener in understanding what they personally need to think, do, or believe personally about it.
 - iii. The point of trying to connect the point to the listener is to ensure that they understand how to apply the point to their own life.
 3. The conclusion of the message is also important to spend time on. The conclusion is the final opportunity to drive the point of the message home and to include how the listener should respond to what they have learned. Again, the conclusion can be a personal or researched story, visual aid, or statistic.
- E. Lastly it is important to go over your message several times after you have it written out, so that you can time it out, become increasingly familiar with the flow of the message, and to strengthen your ability to be clear. Often times hearing ourselves say something audibly allows us to hear how unclear one of our thoughts may be.

Wrap-Up (10 minutes): A good amount of patience and prayer goes into this but think of how well you can serve God's purposes of speaking to others about Him. Think about how encouraged and transformed the listener will be from God's Word. Your Christian message could be a wonderful example for how to be dependent on God's word in clear ways when you speak. In using this training, you will position yourself well to be aligned with the many followers of Christ who have come before you as approved workers for God that hear "Well done, my good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21-23). Now, before we finish please fill out the post training assessment²⁴ (hand out the assessment) to help me and future leaders grow in leading these training sessions going forward. Please pray with me to conclude our time.

²⁴ Appendix 4: Post-Training Assessment.

CHAPTER 5 OUTCOMES

After carrying out six training events of selected sessions on Training Sports Figures to Speak, several conclusions can be drawn from observations, feedback, and participant implementation. The four sessions used for training included: Session One- The Cross (The Gospel), Session Two- Character (Christian Character), Session Three- Capable (Capable to Study the Bible), and Session Four- Clarity (Clear Biblical Messages).

It was intriguing to see the training participants move from confusion to clarity regarding how a Christian communicator can be more effective in the specific areas of training. It was also insightful to see which aspects of the training were most desired by the participants and which sessions of the training were used by the participants to train others. After the training, it was quite clear how the training needed to be improved in order to be more effective and more easily accessible to both participants and future potential training instructors.

Observations

It proved helpful to work with sports figures who were at least slightly more experienced in their faith, and who had an understanding of their need for training, as compared to sports figures who were newer to Christianity, or not necessarily Christians, and perhaps less aware of their need for training. In one instance, training sports figures who were less experienced in their faith led to a vivid objection to biblical truth. One question from one newer Christian coach participant that helped me arrive at this conclusion came in the context of teaching during the Session One- The Cross

(The Gospel), where he posed a subtle disagreement about man's original sin and the depravity of man.¹ The need to further explain this aspect of basic Christianity thus involved me taking a tangent from the established curriculum to more thoroughly explain this tenant of the Gospel. This kind of tangent could present a future less-experienced trainer with challenges depending on his or her own degree of biblical knowledge or training.

Additionally, it was reported that one participant athlete from the Session One-Cross training actually became a Christian as a result of attending the training and hearing a biblical Gospel clearly presented. She had formerly thought she was a Christian, but upon hearing biblical teaching on the Cross, she decided to respond by confessing her belief in Christ for the first time. While true conversion is not a bad outcome, it was beyond the scope of the objective for the training itself. As a possible solution, future iterations of training may be wise to include a pre-requisite of being a Christian sports figure with at least 5 years of already having been a Christian with a clear knowledge of personal salvation. It may also be feasible to have training participants attend the training after receiving at least one reference to aptly affirm their faith in Christ. This pre-requisite may help to maximize the effectiveness of the training for both the individual and the group.

Feedback

The Feedback Assessment survey was created to determine if the training accomplished the intended session objectives. The learner was assessed anonymously

¹ Romans 3:23.

prior to the training and again anonymously after the training was completed. Their forms were matched by numbers to maintain anonymity, but accuracy in a respondent's self-assessment changes. The earliest format and layout of the assessment questions required clarification, which was highlighted by questions asked during the completion of the assessment due to a lack of clarity posed in the assessment questions. Later sessions benefitted from simple editing of the original assessment form.

On average, respondents (7 out of 10) indicated the ability to clearly communicate the Gospel with a fair degree of confidence, but only two respondents actually demonstrated their ability to do so based on the live demonstration. Perhaps, a clearer explanation of the training objectives would help the sports figures more accurately assess themselves at the beginning of the training. Another solution may be to assess the class during the first session, but after the basic competency test of explaining the gospel on an index card, instead of conducting the assessment beforehand. I conducted the assessment beforehand which assumes a prior knowledge in order to accurately complete the assessment. If the assessment were conducted after the live competency test, it may create a more level starting point of understanding with the participants.

The sports figures with the least previous exposure to consistent biblical teaching proved to be the most difficult to train because they appeared at times more in shock and awe than able to internalize and apply what they were learning. In the largest group of respondents, only 55 percent indicated normal current attendance in a church, which may be interpreted to mean that many of the participants may not be

accustomed to being exposed to consistent biblical teaching. However, this does not account for the possibility of media-related biblical teaching or former church participation, which may have included biblical teaching. The assessments of those with the least previous exposure to consistent biblical teaching indicated the least margin of change in comparison to all other assessments. In forthcoming training for that group, it might better focus more on the Cross as an attempt to leave more time for questions and greater depth with the training on the Cross. That group would also seem to do well with a slower-paced training on being Capable to handle the Bible.

Session Three- Capable (Capable to Handle the Word), received the most interest with regard to follow-up requests for more training. It was requested that Session Three be taught in a university setting in order to train a full football coaching staff, as a result of the positive impact the training had on a head coach. Session One-Cross, was the training which received the greatest reuse by the students, and it was also the session which I as an instructor have become the most proficient.

Session Four-Clarity (Clear Biblical Messages) received the least expressed interest by the participants. It seemed that the lack of interest in this session of training was due to a lack of awareness of responsibility to provide more than only inspiration or motivational messages as Christian speakers. This session was also taught the least amount due to the level of maturity required. The minimalized effectiveness of this fourth session may be a direct result of the minimal experience of the instructor as well.

The most difficult session to gain results from in one session proved to be the session on character. Session Two would benefit the most by being conducted in a

context of relational familiarity so as to allow for a perceived safer environment to more readily facilitate a greater depth of openness and authenticity. It could be advantageous to ask future participants to spend some time in prayer prior to the training, and then to come prepared to discuss or note specific areas they already know they need to grow in as it relates to being a servant, integrity-filled, team-oriented, and living life with excellence.

Participant Implementation

Two groups put their training into use. The first group included current student-athletes at Judson University who led a weekly Bible study. After completing their Session One-The Cross, they proceeded to share the four elements of the Cross to their larger group Bible study during four consecutive weeks. We conducted two phases of practice prior to them speaking about the Gospel. Their first practice attempt, during their training, was met with a good deal of anxiety and failure to explain the Gospel clearly. Their next practice attempt produced clearer explanations of the gospel. Finally, they were much more prepared individually and collectively to explain the Gospel to their peers in a group meeting format as a direct result of the training they had received. They were also much more capable of sharing biblically-connected devotionals and testimonies as a result of the training. Future elements of training should certainly include at least two rounds of practice for sharing the Gospel because this mode of training was visibly beneficial for the training to be both effective and quickly passed on through the learners.

Months after the training, two different coaches explained the Gospel to their teams. One coach shared the Gospel to his women's college soccer team. The other coach explained the Gospel to his college men's basketball team the summer after his training. He also became increasingly comfortable speaking about the Bible in front of the team. These messages took the form of shorter spontaneous talks and slightly longer more prepared talks.

One former basketball player demonstrated a dramatic change in his ability to speak. His first attempt at speaking, prior to the training, included sharing personal stories, comic relief, and inspiration. There was no mention of the Cross and no ability to handle the Bible. After approximately three hours of training, specifically from Session-Four Clarity (Clear Biblical Messages), he prepared and shared a Christ-centered message with a good amount of Bible exposition from a passage of Scripture after the training. After having been hired to do college ministry, he has now gone on to train other current and former athletes for college ministry staff under his oversight to share the gospel and handle the Bible.

Going Forward

It may be helpful to add media elements for case studies in the training. The case studies could show a positive example and a negative example to demonstrate a picture of success and failure. The sessions are seemingly best used spread out over the course of several weeks or months, when possible. This allows the learner to implement what they have learned into practice more thoroughly. It is also important to integrate the lessons immediately into the learners attempts to speak.

Given the highlighted usefulness of the training, there is good reason to believe that there can be a new standard set with this new resource available to serve Christian sports figures in their endeavor to use their platform and lives to serve in speaking as agents of the Gospel of Christ in communicating the Word of God. This training has now been tested over the course of several years through training a small portion of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes ministry staff. Additionally, it is being used by staff on a larger test group of sports figures who are current or former coaches and athletes. A ministry is going to be more formally launched out of this training for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes for a Chicago-wide training platform for Christian sports figures.

APPENDIX 1

THE LORD'S PRAYER EXAMPLE MATTHEW 6:9-13

PRAISE GOD FOR WHO HE IS...v.9

- Ps. 19:1...heavens declare glory of the Lord, earth proclaims the work of your hands
- Ps. 63:3...because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you Lord
- Ps. 116:5...gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful
- Lam. 3:22-23...steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never end

Specific Attributes: holiness, character, power, mercy, sovereignty, attentiveness, etc.

SURRENDER TO GODS WILL...v.10

- 1 Thess. 4:3a...for this is the will of God, your sanctification
- Lev. 20:26...we shall be holy (set apart) to God
- 1 Thess. 5:18...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God
- Philp. 4:11b...for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content

ASK GOD FOR DAILY NEEDS... v. 11

- Matt. 6:33-34...seek first the kingdom of God, all these will be added to you
- Luke 4:4...man does not live on bread alone but by every word that comes from God
- 1 Pet. 5:7...cast all your cares on Him, because He cares
- Phil 4:3...be anxious for nothing, but make your requests known to God

CONFESSION & FORGIVENESS... v.12

- Ps. 38:18...I confess my sin to you Lord, I am sorry for my sin
- Ps. 139:23-24...search me, O God; see if there be any grievous way in me
- Ro. 12:3...not think of himself more highly than he ought, but with sober judgment
- I John 2:1-2...if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus
- Col 3:13...forgive one another as the Lord has forgiven you - forgive others who want forgiveness as God forgives us when we confess/repent

AVOID TEMPTATION & EVIL... 13

- Rom. 13:14...put on Christ, make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires
- Matt 5:29-30...fight temptation vigorously
- 1 Thess. 5:22...avoid appearance of evil

APPENDIX 2

PRE-TRAINING ASSESSMENT

Circle a number on a scale of 1-10. (1= Not at all & 10=yes 100%)

Cross-Centered Clarity

1. How clearly can you communicate the Gospel?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. When you speak are you sure you communicate the gospel clearly each time?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Can you explain the entire gospel biblically right now in front of a group with no hesitation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Is your gospel explanation clear enough that you can train others to share it?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Christ-Centered Character

1. Is your character honestly where it needs to be as a leader?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Are you equipped toward being transformed in Christ with the resources you have in your life?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Do others regularly help you grow in Christ?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Do others ever check to see if you are who you should be before asking you to speak?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Are you trained well enough to specifically help others understand key areas they need to grow in Christ?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Capable to Handle the word

1. Do you know how to study the bible well?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Are you consistent in how you study the Bible?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Can you explain right now how you go about studying the Bible?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Can you train others in simple ways how to study God's word?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Content of Your Message

1. Do you know how to prepare a biblical message?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Do you have a method or plan in how to prepare messages?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Can you explain to someone right now how you go about preparing messages?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Can you train others in simple ways how to prepare a biblical message?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Church and Home Life

1. Are you a Member at your local Church?

Please circle (yes or no)

2. Do you attend church at least 3 times per month?

Please circle (yes or no)

3. Is there an elder at your church that you know personally?

Please circle (yes or no)

4. Are you being discipled by anyone at your church?

Please circle (yes or no)

5. Are you in a small group at your church?

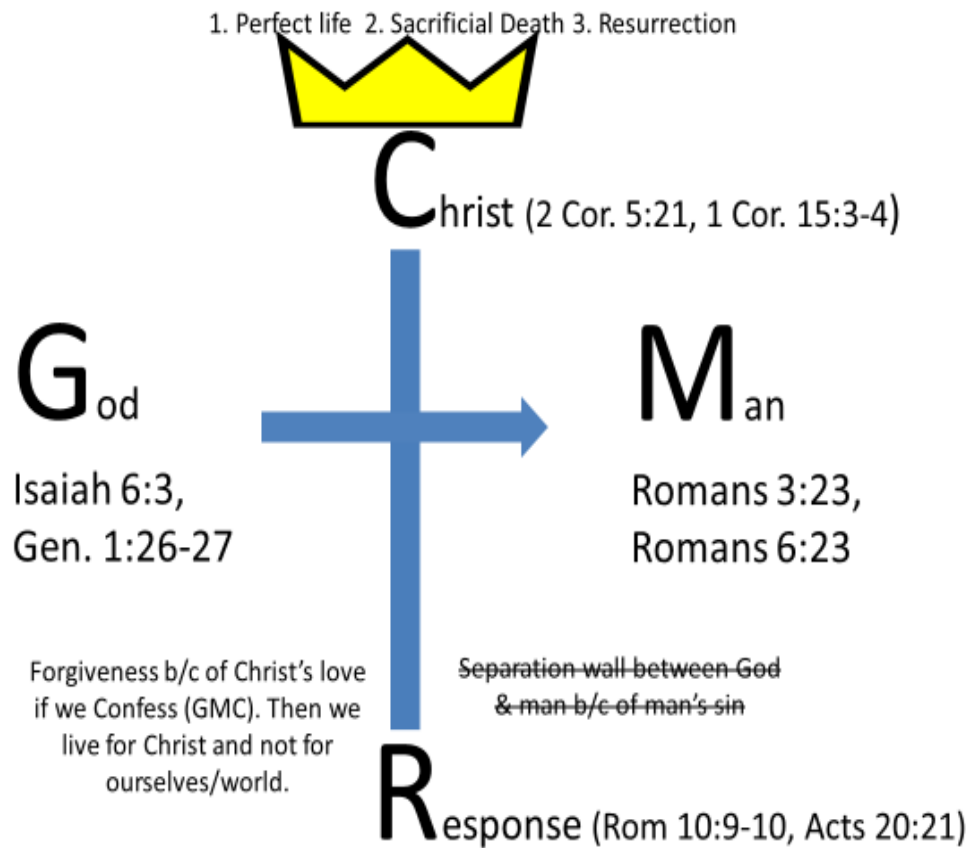
Please circle (yes or no)

6. Are you serving at your church?

Please circle (yes or no)

APPENDIX 3

GOSPEL ILLUSTRATION



APPENDIX 4

POST TRAINING ASSESSMENT

Circle a number on a scale of 1-10. (1= Not at all and 10=yes 100%)

Cross-Centered Clarity

1. How clearly can you communicate the Gospel?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. When you speak, are you sure you communicate the gospel clearly each time?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Can you explain the gospel biblically right now with no hesitation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Is your gospel explanation clear enough that you can train others to share it?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Christ-Centered Character

1. Is your character more likely to get to where it needs to be for you to be a better leader?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Are you now better equipped to continue being transformed in Christ?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Do you have steps to take to have others help you grow in Christ?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- F. Do others ever check to see if you are who you should be, before asking you to speak?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- G. Are you trained well enough to specifically help others understand key areas they need to grow in Christ?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Capable to Handle the word

1. Do you now know how to study the bible better?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Do you have what you need now to be consistent in how you study the bible?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Can you now explain how you go about studying the bible?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Can you now consider what it could look like train others in simple ways how to study God's word?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Content of Your Message

1. Do you better know how to begin to prepare a biblical message?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Do you have a method or plan in how to prepare messages?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Can you explain to someone right now how you go about preparing messages?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Church & Home Life

1. Are you a willing to consider membership at your Church, if not already?

circle (yes or no)

2. Are you committed to increase your church attendance, if not already?

circle (yes or no)

3. Will you seek out meeting with an elder at church, if you haven't already done so?

circle (yes or no)

4. Are you going to seek being discipled by someone at your church, if not already?

circle (yes or no)

5. Will you seek out involvement in a small group at your church, if not already in one?

circle (yes or no)

6. Are you going to seek to serve at your church, if not already serving?

circle (yes or no)

7. Will you seek to strengthen the health of your relationship's b/c of this training?

circle (yes or no)

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